

# Visual Resources / Aesthetics Analysis

## PHOTOVOLTAIC SOLAR FARM

SOL ORCHARD - RAMONA, CALIFORNIA

MUP3300 11-029, ER NO. 3910 11-09-009

APRIL 2012

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# Executive Summary

This Visual Analysis for the proposed Sol Orchard, LLC – Ramona Photovoltaic (PV) Solar Farm Project (Project) provides an evaluation of potential Project impacts on existing visual resources and character of the surrounding community of Ramona, California.

With regard to visual resources, the Project would not result in the introduction of features that would significantly detract from or contrast with the visual character of the surrounding community by conflicting with visual elements or quality of an existing area (i.e., through conflicting style, size, coverage, scale, building materials, etc.). The Project would not result in the removal of or substantial adverse change to one or more features that contribute to the valued visual character or image of the Project area, including but not limited to designated landmarks, historic resources, or trees. Although a limited number of small rock outcroppings within the proposed Major Use Permit (MUP) development area would be removed with the Project, these elements are not considered to lend significant value to the visual quality or character of the landscape. The majority of rock outcroppings onsite, particularly the larger ones, are located outside of the MUP area and would remain in their present natural state. Furthermore, the Project would not substantially obstruct, interrupt, or detract from a valued focal and/or panoramic vista from a public road, trails within an adopted County or State trail system, scenic vista or highway, or recreational area. The Project as designed would also not result in an inconsistency with any goals, standards, or policies related to visual resources as given in the County General Plan Update, Ramona Community Plan, or County Zoning Ordinance.

For the above reasons, it was determined that the proposed Project would not result in potentially significant impacts on visual resources within the Ramona community. As such, no mitigation measures are required or proposed.

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# 1.0 Introduction

## 1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this Visual Resources/Aesthetics Impact Analysis is to assess the potential visual impacts of the Project, determine the significance of the impacts under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), and to propose measures to avoid, minimize, or mitigate potential adverse visual impacts associated with construction of the proposed Sol Orchard, LLC – Ramona Photovoltaic (PV) Solar Farm Project (Project) on the surrounding visual environment.

The Project is intended to allow for the installation and operation of a photovoltaic electrical generation facility and represents an opportunity to provide residents of Ramona and the greater surrounding area with a clean source of solar energy. Power from the Project would replace a portion of the energy currently supplied to the power grid by non-renewable sources located far away from Ramona, which require transmission lines to deliver power to the Ramona area. The proposed Project would instead deliver renewable energy to San Diego Gas and Electric (SDG&E) customers in the local area in the cleanest, most efficient manner feasible today by generating renewable power locally and feeding into the existing local distribution system.

In the broad spectrum of renewable energy projects, the proposed Project fits into the category known as Wholesale Distributed Generation (WDG). WDG is currently the most cost-effective renewable energy market segment because it optimizes the utilization of appropriate and available sites to serve the local load, while avoiding costs and delays associated with transmission upgrades that are required for larger, central station projects located far from the load being served. Transmission of power over great distances also leads to significant losses to resistance and transformation, and such losses broadly degrade the efficiency and usefulness of such large, central station generators.

The Sol Orchard Ramona Project has the following specific objectives:

- ☞ Deploy a photovoltaic solar technology that has been proven and is readily available, efficient, and environmentally friendly.
- ☞ Generate electricity at a cost that is competitive on the renewable market.

- ⌘ Generate electricity in immediate proximity to where it is being consumed, thereby reducing demand on existing transmission lines and the need for more transmission lines.
- ⌘ Provide a new source of renewable energy that assists the power purchaser and the State of California in achieving the Renewable Portfolio Standard (RPS).
- ⌘ Deliver electricity to the grid as soon as possible. The applicant has executed a long-term Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) with San Diego Gas and Electric to purchase all electricity generated by the Project.
- ⌘ Locate the Project on land with non-sensitive habitat in a rural setting where there is direct access to the existing electric distribution system.
- ⌘ Minimize potential impacts to the environment by:
  - Locating the Project on disturbed and degraded land to minimize potential impacts to threatened and endangered species and habitat.
  - Maximizing the use of existing infrastructure (distribution lines, roads, water source).
  - Reducing the emission of greenhouse gases from the generation of electricity.

## 1.2 Key Issues

Key issues to be evaluated in this analysis are whether the Project has the potential to adversely impact the existing visual character or quality of the affected properties and/or the physical or natural surroundings. Potential visual effects are considered from public roadways and other public vantage points in and around the Ramona community. Project design attributes; the potential to remove, change, or add features that contribute to the existing quality of the visual landscape; and, potential conflicts with applicable plans or policies relating to visual resources are considered.

## 1.3 Principal Viewpoints to be Covered

The Project site would be intermittently visible from a number of principal public viewpoints within the area, as follows:

- ☞ Warnock Drive looking southwest
- ☞ Warnock Drive/Ramona Street looking southeast
- ☞ Ramona Street looking southeast
- ☞ (Future) Dye Road looking east

Other views may occur from surrounding public vantage points with the surrounding mountains or higher points of elevation within the Project vicinity. Public recreational areas in the vicinity of the Project site include Swartz Canyon County Park to the east, Cleveland National Forest to the east/southeast and north, and San Pasqual County Park to the northwest; however, these parks are distanced from the site and are located outside of the viewshed within which the Project would be visible. Several open space preserves are also located within the surrounding area and include Ramona Grasslands Open Space Preserve, approximately 2.2 miles to the northwest; Simon Open Space Preserve, approximately 2.1 miles to the east; and, Barnett Ranch Open Space Preserve, approximately 0.5 miles to the south; however, due to distance and/or intervening topography, views of the site would be obscured. As the Project site lies along the valley floor, views to the site from within the valley are restricted. Limited views may occur from surrounding residential, industrial, and/or agricultural uses on private lands within the valley or on hillsides surrounding the valley floor, but would generally be visually reduced due to intervening vegetation, development, and/or elevational differences, in addition to distance from the Project site.

## 2.0 Project Description

### 2.1 Project Location

The proposed Project site is located just south of the community of Ramona, California, within north-central San Diego County. The Project site is bordered by Warnock Drive to the north and Ramona Street to the west, and is generally located between Ramona Street to the west and San Vicente Road further to the east. The affected County Assessor Parcel Number (APN) is 283-083-07. Refer to Figure 1, Regional Location Map, and Figure 2, Local Vicinity Map/Key Viewpoint Locations.

### 2.2 Project Description

The Project proponent is preparing an application for development and operation of a photovoltaic (PV) solar farm to be located on privately-held lands near Ramona. The Project would require approval from the County of San Diego for a Major Use Permit (MUP) to allow for the construction, operation, and maintenance of such facilities for the long-term generation of solar energy. The proposed facilities would have an overall production capacity of 7.5 Megawatts (MW) (alternating current – AC). The Project is expected to supply to the Ramona area roughly 10 percent of power at peak load conditions and 20 to 25 percent during lighter load conditions. No export to transmission is anticipated.

The proposed PV solar facilities would be installed on a portion of an approximately 110-acre parcel to achieve the intended MW output; however, development and MUP authority would be limited to 42.7 acres of the parcel, allowing the unaffected acreage to remain in its present state (dry farming/pasture/fallow agricultural lands). The Project design would consist of PV solar panels mounted on a collection of single-axis tracking (SAT) systems supported by machine-driven posts. In isolated cases where geotechnical constraints are encountered, a ballast foundation system would be provided. The solar panels would be either mono-crystalline or poly-crystalline silicon cell modules.

The solar panels would be aligned in rows that rotate to face east in the morning and west in the afternoon hours, tracking the sun about a north/south axis to maximize solar absorption. The panels would be rack-mounted three-wide, measuring approximately 9.5 feet across each row



when flat (horizontal). When fully inclined to 45-degrees, the upper edge of the tallest panels would be 8-11.5 feet from the ground surface depending on terrain. When flat, all panels would measure 4.5-8 feet above ground, depending on terrain. As the maximum height of the proposed PV solar panels would range from approximately 8-11.5 feet as measured from ground surface, the solar panels would not represent elements of large scale or height within the existing landscape. The length of each row of panels would be approximately 150 feet along the north/south axis. The ultimate arrangement/number of PV solar panels, racking, inverter pads and structures, and internal access are shown in on the MUP Plot Plan to illustrate the general configuration of the proposed solar collection system; however, this layout is subject to modification at final engineering design. Refer to Figure 3A, Major Use Permit Plot Plan (Sheet 1 of 3), and Figure 3B, Major Use Permit Plot Plan (Sheet 2 of 3).

### 2.2.1 Panel Interconnections, Inverters, Distributed Transformers and Switch Gear

Panel arrays would be electrically connected into panel strings using wiring attached to the racking. Panel strings would be electrically connected to each other via underground wiring. Wire depths would be in accordance with local, State, and Federal codes. Gathering lines would connect individual panel array strings to one or more inverters/transformers and combiner boxes. Wiring from the panel strings would be connected to combiner boxes, and electrical current would then be transferred to the inverters which would convert the Direct Current (DC) produced by the PV panels into Alternating Current (AC). A pad-mounted transformer installed next to each inverter would increase the voltage. The AC would then travel through underground gathering lines to a common utility interconnection point.

### 2.2.2 System Interconnection Points

Energy generated by the Project would be delivered to an existing 12 kV distribution line that runs parallel to Warnock Drive. Connection would be made from the Project site via overhead line to an existing pole located on Warnock Drive. No export to transmission is anticipated.

### 2.2.3 Inverter Enclosures

Approximately seven small-scale, aboveground structures would be constructed within the solar panel fields to weatherize inverter/distributor transformers and switching gear. These

structures would be approximately 11 feet by 36 feet in size, and 10 feet in height at the apex, and constructed on a level one-foot high concrete building pad; refer to Figure 3B, Major Use Permit Plot Plan – Sheet 2 of 3. The structures would be constructed of non-flammable materials (i.e., steel) with a metal roof. Each structure would be designed with screened ventilation to allow for the circulation of air for cooling purposes. The AC generated would be transferred from the inverters via underground gathering lines.

## 2.2.4 Creelman Substation

The existing Creelman Substation, located approximately 1.2 mile to the east of the Project site, is owned and operated by SDG&E. No modifications to the Substation or upgrades to the transmission line along Warnock Drive (also owned by SDG&E) would be required to accommodate power generated by the proposed Project. As such, these facilities would not be under the ownership of Sol Orchard, LLC, and are therefore not considered as part of the MUP application.

## 2.2.5 Grading / Retaining Walls

The PV solar panels would be installed in parallel rows running north-south; refer to Figure 3A, Major Use Permit Plot Plan (Sheet 1 of 3). Although the majority of land surface within the MUP area is flat, portions would be cleared and grubbed to allow for installation of the panels and associated facilities; refer to Figure 3D, Preliminary Grading Plan. Minor grading would be required to allow for construction of a portion of the perimeter access road in the eastern portion of the site, along the existing San Diego Gas and Electric (SDG&E) easement. Grading would be limited to approximately 2,400 cubic yards (c.y.) of balanced cut and fill. Additionally, an associated retaining wall, approximately 300 feet in length and 0 to 5 feet in height, would be required in support of construction of this perimeter access road.

## 2.2.6 Lighting and Glare

Limited Project lighting would be installed to allow for security. Low-level lighting would be installed at the main entry gate to facilitate access. All lighting would be operated manually or activated via motion sensors, and would be shielded and directed downward to minimize the potential for glare or spillover onto adjacent ownerships. All lighting would conform to County of San Diego outdoor lighting requirements.

The PV solar panels would be either mono- or poly-crystalline material and would be black in color and highly absorptive. The materials used to construct the panels are designed to minimize the potential for reflection and retain as much of the solar spectrum as possible, thereby reducing glare. Additionally, based on technical evidence evaluating the reflectivity of the PV solar panels, the proposed Project would not install highly reflective building materials that would result in a substantial increase in light or glare that could affect the surrounding area, or that would produce reflective light that could create adverse disability or discomfort glare.

## 2.2.7 Signage

Minimal Project signage is proposed to allow for the identification of the Project owner and for safety and security purposes. An illuminated directory sign (lighting would be activated via motion sensor) will be located at the entrance of the facility at Ramona Street. Signage is proposed to be installed on the fence in the vicinity of the main entry gates off Ramona Street. Signage would identify the Project operator and owner as Sol Orchard, LLC, and would provide emergency contact information. All signage would conform to County of San Diego signage requirements for the applicable zone. No freestanding signage is proposed as part of the Project.

In addition, small-scale signage would be posted at the main entry gates, as well as intermittently along the perimeter fencing on all exterior parcel boundaries, to indicate “No Trespassing” and “Private Property” for security, as allowed by County regulations.

## 2.2.8 Access / Circulation

### Construction Access

All materials for Project construction would be delivered to the site by truck. The majority of construction traffic would occur on designated truck routes and/or major streets (e.g. Ramona Street or Warnock Drive), with access to the site occurring from the west via Ramona Street. Traffic resulting from construction activities would be temporary and may occur along area roadways as workers and materials are transported to and from the Project area. If directed by the County, the Project applicant would prepare a Traffic Construction Mitigation Plan to ensure that circulation on the affected roadways is not adversely affect and that public safety is maintained. The need for a Traffic Mitigation Plan would be determined by the County Department of Public Works (DPW), prior to the approval of any grading/building permit;

however, it is anticipated that a Traffic Mitigation Plan would be a condition of approval required.

## Long-Term Access

No offsite roadway improvements are proposed along Ramona Street or Warnock Drive to accommodate the Project, with exception of minor improvements to the proposed entrance along Ramona Street. Long-term primary access to the Project site would be provided from Ramona Street.

Dye Road would be extended by the County across the northwestern portion of the 110-acre property as a future Capital Improvements Project (CIP); refer to Figure 3A, Major Use Permit Plot Plan (Sheet 1 of 3). The Project has been designed to accommodate this future roadway alignment through the subject property. Interior access would be provided by a looped 24-foot wide decomposed granite (d.g.) perimeter fire access road that would be maintained to provide a fire buffer as well as to facilitate onsite circulation for emergency vehicles. In addition, a system of internal roadways, 24 feet in width would be provided approximately every 300 feet between the north-south blocks of PV solar panels (approximately 150 feet to either side) for emergency access. Additional roads are also proposed within the MUP area among the rows of PV solar panels for maintenance purposes.

## 2.2.9 Landscaping

Landscaping is proposed for screening purposes along the western and northern portions of the MUP area perimeter to reduce views of the proposed Project from offsite vantage points; refer to Figure 3C, Major Use Permit (Sheet 3 of 3) – Conceptual Landscape Plan, for the proposed treatment along particular perimeter fencing segments. The use of a variety of vegetation is proposed, including but not limited to, shrubs such as toyon, scrub oak, and sugar bush, or evergreen vine such as creeping fig, English ivy, cape honey suckle, and star jasmine. Along portions of the fence that are more highly visible from offsite vantage points, a combination of vines, shrubs, and trees would be planted to provide a variety of plant densities and heights to ensure that views into the proposed development area would be avoided or minimized. An 8-foot high chain-link security fence would be installed along the MUP area perimeter. Along several segments of the chain-link fence that would be more visible from Warnock Drive and/or Ramona Street, vinyl-coated chain-link fencing (8 feet in height) would be installed to

further reduce views of the proposed development; refer to Figure 3C. An existing barbed wire fence is present along the perimeter of the subject 110-acre property.

## 2.2.10 Project Schedule / Phasing

It is anticipated that overall construction of the Project would take approximately six months to complete. Construction crews would work five days per week, eight hours per day.

## 2.2.11 Operation, Security, and Maintenance

The facilities would be monitored remotely by Sol Orchard LLC or an affiliated company. Once the solar panels are installed, the panels would operate during daylight hours, seven days per week, and 365 days per year. As stated above, security would be maintained through installation of an 8-foot high chain-link fence around the perimeter of the MUP area. It is anticipated that maintenance of the facilities would require occasional visual inspections and minor repairs. Overall, minimal maintenance requirements are anticipated, as the panels would operate on their own with little human involvement required. On intermittent occasions, the presence of several workers may be required if major repairs or replacement of equipment is required; however, due to the nature of the facilities, such actions are anticipated to be infrequent. Occasional equipment replacement or refurbishing may also be conducted.

## 2.2.12 Trails

No offsite roadway improvements are proposed as part of the Project, with exception of minor improvements for the proposed driveway along Ramona Street. The Project design does not include the construction of any public trails or pathways along Warnock Drive or Ramona Street; however, the Project applicant will clear a path (maximum 10 feet in width) along Ramona Street and Warnock Drive. The width of the path would vary when necessary to avoid existing utilities within the right-of-way. No grading, surfacing, or other improvements are required or proposed with regard to the paths.

A number of public recreational areas are located within the Ramona area that offer hiking trails. These areas may include San Pasqual County Park, approximately six miles to the northwest; Swartz Canyon County Park, approximately four miles to the east; and, Blue Sky Ecological Reserve, approximately six miles to the west. Additionally, the Cleveland National

Forest is located approximately seven miles to the north and 7.5 miles to the east. Several open space preserves are also located within the surrounding area and include Ramona Grasslands Open Space Preserve, approximately 2.2 miles to the northwest; Simon Open Space Preserve, approximately 2.1 miles to the east; and, Barnett Ranch Open Space Preserve, approximately 0.5 miles to the south. Refer to Figure 8, Viewshed/Landscape Unit Map, for location of these open space preserves. Due to the topography of the area and the highly varied geographic forms of the various surrounding mountains, views from public trails within designated public recreational areas in the site vicinity would be blocked by intervening landforms and vegetation; refer to Section 5.5, Determination of Significance.

### 2.2.13 Dust/Erosion Control

In order to control dust and/or erosion during the life of the Project, a non-toxic, biodegradable, dust/erosion control agent would be applied to all disturbed or exposed surface areas as follows: a) A permeable dust/erosion control agent suitable for both traffic and non-traffic areas shall be used. These agents shall be biodegradable, eco-safe, with liquid copolymers that stabilize and solidify soils or aggregates and facilitate dust suppression. The dust/erosion control agent would be reapplied approximately every two-three years for maintenance purposes; or, b) Alternatively, on exposed areas other than Project fire access roads intended to serve for emergency access or maintenance purposes, a non-irrigated hydroseed mixture may be applied (e.g. disturbed areas under the rows of PV solar panels).

## 2.3 General Plan Land Use Designations and Zoning

General Plan land use designations and zoning for the affected parcels are given in Table 1, below. No changes to either the existing General Plan land use or zoning are proposed with the Project.

**TABLE 1**  
**EXISTING GENERAL PLAN LAND USE / REGIONAL CATEGORY / ZONING**

Assessor Parcel Number	Approximate Acreage	General Plan Land Use Designation	Regional Category	Zoning
283-083-07	42.7*	SR-4	Semi-Rural Residential	(A72) General Agriculture

\* The MUP area would be limited to approximately 42.7 acres of the 110-acre parcel.

### 2.3.1 Anticipated Permits and Agency Approvals Required

The County of San Diego will act as the Lead Agency under the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Approval from the County of San Diego would be required for construction permits, as well as for right-of-way encroachment permits, if applicable, prior to commencement of ground-disturbing activities. The anticipated permits and approvals required are listed in Table 2.

**TABLE 2  
APPROVALS AND PERMITS ANTICIPATED**

<b>Permit/Approval</b>	<b>Approving Agency</b>
Major Use Permit	County of San Diego – Department of Planning and Land Use
Air Quality Permit to Construct	Air Pollution Control District
National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Permit	San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB)
General Construction Storm Water Permit	RWQCB
Right-of-Way Encroachment Permit	County of San Diego Public Works Dept.

## 2.4 Regulatory Framework

### 2.4.1 State of California Guidelines

The Project is subject to technical and environmental review pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), in conformance with applicable regulatory guidelines established by the County of San Diego.

Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines states that a project has the potential for a significant impact if it will:

- a) Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista;
- b) Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to: trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic route;

- c) Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings; or,
- d) Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views of the area.

In addition, CEQA Section 15064 (b) states "...the significance of an activity may vary with the setting ... an activity which may not be significant in an urban area may be significant in a rural area." This statement is applicable to the determination of the significance of a visual effect for the Project.

## 2.4.2 San Diego County Plans and Policies

The Project is subject to conformance with several plans and policies that pertain to issues such as land use and zoning, visual resources, and the overall character of the Ramona community. The following documents were reviewed and Project conformance with such documents was evaluated to determine the Project's consistency with the goals, objectives, and policies, as well as measures relative to design. The applicable goals, objectives, and policies are identified below, and a discussion of Project consistency with such measures is included in Appendix A of this document.

☞ County of San Diego General Plan Update

☞ Ramona Community Plan

☞ County of San Diego Zoning Ordinance

### San Diego General Plan Update (Adopted August 3, 2011)

The County of San Diego General Plan Update (adopted August 3, 2011) is intended to provide guidance for the long-term development of San Diego County. The General Plan Update includes various Elements that provide guidance for accommodating future growth while retaining or enhancing the County's rural character, its economy, its environmental resources, and its unique communities. Goals, policies and objectives are provided within each of the Elements to guide future land development and ensure consistency with the County's intended vision for the future of San Diego County. The Guiding Principles of the General Plan Update are to:



- ⌘ Support a reasonable share of projected regional population growth;
- ⌘ Promote health and sustainability by locating new growth near existing and planned infrastructure, services, and jobs in a compact pattern of development;
- ⌘ Reinforce the vitality, local economy, and individual character of existing communities when planning new housing, employment, and recreational opportunities;
- ⌘ Promote environmental stewardship that protects the range of natural resources and habitats that uniquely define the County's character and ecological importance;
- ⌘ Ensure that development accounts for physical constraints and the natural hazards of the land;
- ⌘ Provide and support a multi-modal transportation network that enhances connectivity and supports community development patterns and, when appropriate, plan for development which supports public transportation;
- ⌘ Maintain environmentally sustainable communities and reduce greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to climate change;
- ⌘ Preserve agriculture as an integral component of the region's economy, character, and open space network;
- ⌘ Minimize public costs of infrastructure and services and correlate their timing with new development; and,
- ⌘ Recognize community and stakeholder interests while striving for consensus.

### **Chapter 3 - Land Use Element**

#### Planning for Sustainability

##### *Policies*

- ⌘ **LU-6.9 Development Conformance with Topography.** Require development to conform to the natural topography to limit grading; incorporate and not significantly alter the dominant physical characteristics of a site; and, to utilize natural drainage and topography in conveying storm water to the maximum extent practicable.

## Semi-Rural/Rural Lands

### *Policies*

- ⌘ **LU-10.2 Development - Environmental Resource Relationship.** Require development in Semi-Rural and Rural areas to respect and conserve the unique natural features and rural character and avoid sensitive or intact environmental resources and hazard areas.

## GOAL LU-12

### Infrastructure and Services Supporting Development

### *Policies*

- ⌘ **LU-12.4 Planning for Compatibility.** Plan and site infrastructure for public utilities and public facilities in a manner compatible with community character, minimize visual and environmental impacts, and whenever feasible, locate any facilities and supporting infrastructure outside preserve areas. Require context sensitive Mobility Element road design that is compatible with community character and minimizes visual and environmental impacts; for Mobility Element roads identified in Table M-4, an LOS D or better may not be achieved.

## **Chapter 5 – Conservation and Open Space Element**

### Visual Resources

According to the Conservation and Open Space Element, a highway corridor generally includes the land adjacent to and visible from the vehicular right-of-way. A “scenic highway” may include “any freeway, highway, road, or other vehicular right-of-way along a corridor with considerable natural or otherwise scenic landscape.” A highway may be designated as “scenic” depending on how much of the natural landscape can be seen by travelers, the aesthetic quality of the landscape, and the extent to which development intrudes upon the traveler’s enjoyment of the view.

The Conservation and Open Space Element does not identify any roadways adjacent to the Project site as County Scenic Highways. Table 3, below, identifies the distance to the Project site and the potential visibility of the site from designated County Scenic Highways in the area.

**TABLE 3  
COUNTY SCENIC HIGHWAYS**

<b>Roadway</b>	<b>Distance to Project Site</b>	<b>Visibility of Project Site</b>
State Route 78 from Via Rancho Parkway to State Route 79 (excluding portion within City of San Diego)	Road located approximately 1.9 miles north	Project site not visible due to similar elevation, topography, and intervening development/vegetation
Highland Valley Road from City of San Diego limits to State Route 67	Road located approximately 1.7 miles west	Project site not visible due to similar elevation, topography, and intervening development/vegetation
San Vicente and Ramona Oaks Roads from State Route 78 to Cleveland National Forest	Road located approximately 0.25 miles east	Project site not visible due to similar elevation, topography, and intervening development/vegetation

Goal COS-11

- ⌘ **Preservation of Scenic Resources.** Preservation of scenic resources, including vistas of important natural and unique features, where visual impacts of development are minimized.

*Policies*

- ⌘ **COS-11.1 Protection of Scenic Resources.** Require the protection of scenic highways, corridors, regionally significant scenic vistas, and natural features, including prominent ridgelines, dominant landforms, reservoirs, and scenic landscapes.
- ⌘ **COS-11.2 Scenic Resource Connections.** Promote the connection of regionally significant natural features, designated historic landmarks, and points of regional historic, visual, and cultural interest via designated scenic corridors, such as scenic highways and regional trails.
- ⌘ **COS-11.3 Development Siting and Design.** Require development within visually sensitive areas to minimize visual impacts and to preserve unique or special visual features, particularly in rural areas, through the following:
  - Creative site planning;
  - Integration of natural features into the project;

- Appropriate scale, materials, and design to complement the surrounding natural landscape;
  - Minimal disturbance of topography;
  - Clustering of development so as to preserve a balance of open space vistas, natural features, and community character; and,
  - Creation of contiguous open space networks.
- ⌘ **COS-11.5 Collaboration with Private and Public Agencies.** Coordinate with the California Public Utilities Commission, power companies, and other public agencies to avoid siting energy generation, transmission facilities, and other public improvements in locations that impact visually sensitive areas, whenever feasible. Require the design of public improvements within visually sensitive areas to blend into the landscape.
- ⌘ **COS-11.7 Underground Utilities.** Require new development to place utilities underground and encourage “undergrounding” in existing development to maintain viewsheds, reduce hazards associated with hanging lines and utility poles, and to keep pace with current and future technologies.

### GOAL COS-13

- ⌘ **Dark Skies.** Preserved dark skies that contribute to rural character and are necessary for the local observatories.

#### *Policies*

- ⌘ **COS-13.1 Restrict Light and Glare.** Restrict outdoor light and glare from development projects in Semi-Rural and Rural Lands and designated rural communities to retain the quality of night skies by minimizing light pollution.
- ⌘ **COS-13.2 Palomar and Mount Laguna.** Minimize, to the maximum extent feasible, the impact of development on the dark skies surrounding Palomar and Mount Laguna observatories to maintain dark skies which are vital to these two world-class observatories by restricting exterior light sources within the impact areas of the observatories.
- ⌘ **COS-13.3 Collaboration to Retain Night Skies.** Coordinate with adjacent Federal and State agencies, local jurisdictions, and tribal governments to retain the quality of night skies by minimizing light pollution.

## Air Quality, Climate Change, and Energy

### GOAL COS-14 – Sustainable Land Development

#### *Policies*

- ✧ **COS-14.4 Sustainable Technology and Projects.** Require technologies and projects that contribute to the conservation of resources in a sustainable manner, that are compatible with community character, and that increase the self-sufficiency of individual communities, residents, and businesses.

### San Diego County General Plan (Superseded)

The County of San Diego General Plan was replaced by the current General Plan Update in August 2011. The Scenic Highway Element of the (superseded) General Plan (Part VI) was intended to enhance and protect resources of scenic, historic, and recreational value within both rural and scenic highway corridors. The Scenic Highway Priority List utilized the following criteria in classifying scenic roadways:

- ✧ Routes traversing and providing access to major recreational, scenic or historic resources;
- ✧ Routes traversing lands under the jurisdiction of public agencies;
- ✧ Routes supported by significant local community interest; and,
- ✧ Routes offering unique opportunities for the protection and enhancement of scenic recreational and historic resources.

Routes that meet two or more of these criteria are identified as first priority routes within the General Plan Circulation Element. If two criteria are met, routes are classified as second priority. Routes meeting one criterion are classified as third priority.

With regard to the Project, these criteria would not apply, as they have been superseded by the General Plan Update Open Space and Conservation Element; however, these criteria are provided herein upon request of the County to provide an understanding of the characteristics considers valuable in determining the scenic value of a roadway within the County. Refer also to the discussion of Project conformance with the General Plan Update provided in Appendix A.

## San Diego County Zoning Ordinance

Portions of the County Zoning Ordinance that may affect the assessment of visual impacts are generally zoning overlay designators. Relevant designators include:

- ⌘ B – Community Design Review Area
- ⌘ D – Design Review Area
- ⌘ G – Sensitive Resource
- ⌘ H – Historic/ Archaeological Landmark or District
- ⌘ J – Special Historic District
- ⌘ S – Scenic Area

None of the above designators apply to the Project site, with exception of the G designator relative to structure height.

### 2.4.3 Design Policies and Guidances

#### Ramona Community Plan (Adopted August 3, 2011)

The Ramona Community Plan is supplemental to the County General Plan and provides goals and policies to guide development of the Ramona area of central San Diego County, which includes the Project site.

#### Community Background

##### c. Environmental Setting

##### ENERGY

*Most of the electrical energy used in the CPA is supplied by San Diego Gas and Electric Company. The sources of this energy are far from Ramona; however, as is the case with air quality, conservation measures must be applied on a region-wide basis, and each individual and public agency will increasingly be required to modify their existing practices. Additionally, however, the use of local energy resources from the sun and wind are encouraged in the Ramona Community Plan, as an alternative to depend on, and further incremental depletion of, regional supplies.*

## 1. Land Use (LU)

### Community Character

Goal LU 1.1. The rural atmosphere of the Ramona community is preserved and enhanced, while encouraging a balance of land uses that are compatible with a country lifestyle.

### 1.3 Community Conservation and Protection

Refer to General Plan Goals and Policies.

## 2. Circulation and Mobility

### 2.1 Integrated Mobility and Access

Goal CM 1.1 A circulation system that accommodates pedestrian, equestrian, cycling, as well as vehicular users.

### 2.2 Local Road Network

Goal CM 2.1 A circulation network which will efficiently serve present and future land uses, will facilitate movement between Ramona and other communities, but will not negatively impact the character of the community.

Policy CM 2.1.3 Ensure that road design follows the natural contours thereby minimizing any impact upon the aesthetic and environmental character of the planning area.

### 2.10 Infrastructure and Utilities

d. Energy (Natural Gas and Electricity)

Refer to General Plan Goals and Policies.

## Conservation and Open Space (COS)

### 3.1 Resource Conservation and Management

Goal COS 1.1 The conservation, preservation, and wise utilization of resources in the Ramona planning area.

### c. Scenic Resources and Highways

*Designation of selected major scenic routes through the Ramona Community Planning Area will preserve the scenic integrity of the visual corridors of these routes. These routes are designated in the Conservation and Open Space Element of the General Plan Update, Table COS-1 and Figure C-5. The Community Plan recommends implementation of the Scenic Preservation Overlay Zone along the corridors of these routes to provide protection from unsightly land uses until such time as the appropriate agency (State or County) can initiate complete corridor studies and development guidelines. The routes chosen through the Ramona Area also provide links to other scenic highway segments adopted for neighboring communities and cities.*



## 3.0 Visual Environment of the Project

### 3.1 Project Setting

#### 3.1.1 PV Solar Generation Facilities

Portions of the Project site are presently disturbed/developed. Habitat on the affected 110-acre parcel is classified as Disturbed Habitat; Disturbed Wetland; Eucalyptus Woodland; Field/Pasture; Intensive Agriculture; Non-Native Grassland; Row Crops; and, Urban/Developed.

Portions of the MUP area currently supports limited active agricultural operations (dry farming/pasture), as well as portions of fallow agricultural lands. The central portion of the site (not included under authority of the MUP) supports a livestock raising facility supported by three main structures (steel barns), with a number of supporting agricultural structures clustered around the main buildings; refer to Figure 3A, Major Use Permit Plot Plan (Sheet 1 of 3). Two existing man-made ponds are located within proximity to the main buildings in support of the agricultural operations conducted. These developed areas onsite are not included as part of the MUP and would therefore remain in their present state following Project implementation. Dry farming on portions of the site has also occurred over the past decade; however, such operations would cease with development of the site with the proposed PV solar facilities.

Topography of the site is relatively flat, sloping southwesterly at approximately 0.5 percent. No steep slopes, hillsides, or areas prone to landslide or subsidence occur onsite or on adjacent lands. Drainage from the site flows generally from east to west, flowing to a point along Ramona Street. Two existing ponds are also present onsite in the north-central and western-central portions; however, the presence of water within these ponds is seasonal, and at most times, the ponds are dry. These ponds are located outside of the area affected by the MUP.

#### 3.1.2 Surrounding Land Use

The Project area is located to the southeast of the community of Ramona, which is in central San Diego County. The community lies within the Ramona Valley and is generally ringed by

mountains. To the west/southwest lie Starvation Mountain, Woodson Mountain, and Iron Mountain; to the north are San Pasqual County Park (views to site blocked) and Orosco Ridge. Further to the east are the Swartz Canyon County Park and San Vicente Country Club and Golf Course. Further to the southeast are San Vicente Mountain, and to the south are various hillsides and mountains ranging in topography and elevation and the Barona Creek Golf Club. To the north/northeast and southeast lies the Cleveland National Forest.

Development within the “core” of the Ramona community generally tends to be more urban in nature, represented by a range of residential, commercial, and industrial-type uses occurring at a higher density. Land uses become more rural as one travels into the surrounding lands where larger-acre, lower density single-family residential uses mixed with large- and small-scale commercial agricultural uses become more common.

A mixture of single-family rural residential uses combined with small-scale agricultural uses, and larger-scale agricultural uses, are generally present on lands adjacent to the Project site on all sides. An existing dairy is located across Warnock Drive to the north, along with a mixture of rural residential uses and lands supporting small- and large-scale agricultural operations. Lands utilized for row crops and pasture lands are located to the northeast. To the east is a recreational paintball facility open to the public and a large-scale agricultural use. To the south are additional lands supporting larger-scale agricultural activities; a goat farm is located to the southeast. To the west are additional large-scale agricultural lands and to the northwest, is a mixture of rural residential uses, generally combined with small-scale agricultural operations. Refer to Figure 4, Existing Views – Key Map, and Figure 7, Photo Survey – Onsite/Offsite Photographs.

The Project site is located along the valley floor, with the hillsides generally rising to the northeast, east, southeast, south, and southwest and occur at a greater distance from the site to the west and north. Land uses along the lower portions of the hillsides are generally represented by single-family rural-residential uses mixed with small- and larger-scale agricultural uses. Due to their location at a higher elevation than the Project site, a number of uses to the southwest/south/southeast and east may have views to the valley floor, and therefore, the Project site; however, such views are generally diminished by distance and intervening development and landscaping. Undeveloped and/or disturbed lands are also interspersed throughout the valley floor.

### 3.1.3 Visual Quality Definitions

Visual quality is affected by the aesthetic characteristics of a particular area. Such aesthetic elements may include physical characteristics, as well as the perception of the viewer. Physical characteristics influencing the visual quality of an area may include such features as topography, landform, natural vegetation, water bodies, visual diversity, and visible coloring. Viewer perception is generally influenced by vividness, intactness, harmony, visual integrity, adjacent scenery, and/or visual unity. These elements all influence the overall evaluation of the quality of a particular view.

#### High Visual Quality

Areas with high visual quality may offer physical characteristics such as varying vertical relief; established natural vegetation with visually pleasing form, color, texture or pattern; water features; or, other elements that create a visually unified landscape. Particular views with high visual quality may include those with distinct focal points or patterns; enhanced or existing natural scenery; compatibility with the character of the surrounding landscape; and/or, a unique visual setting within the surrounding area.

#### Moderate Visual Quality

Moderate visual quality is generally considered to be represented by views that are interesting, but not visually exceptional with regard to landforms or other physical characteristics. Such views may consist of dominant types of vegetation; water features; colors within the landscape; or, other elements that visually unify a particular view or landscape. Contributing factors may include a varied composition that includes visual patterns created by landscape elements; enhancement of views from adjacent scenery; and/or, a visual setting that is distinguishable from, as well as visually similar to, views within the surrounding area.

#### Low Visual Quality

Low visual quality may be represented by areas with limited or no existing landforms or changes in topography; sparse or indiscernible vegetation types, due to density; absence of water features; monotonous color palettes; or, limited visual elements of varying visual interest. Visual quality may be considered to be low if views are varied, but visually disconnected; lack perceivable visual patterns; are adjacent to views that devalue the existing scenic quality; or, do

not generally represent a visual setting that is common and/or valued within the surrounding area.

## 3.2 Project Viewshed

The viewshed is generally the area that is visible from an observer's viewpoint and includes the screening effects of intervening vegetation and/or physical structures. Viewsheds may occur from designated scenic viewpoints or from singular vantage points where an unobstructed view of visual components within the landscape exists. The viewshed is composed of such elements as topography and natural land features (i.e., hillsides, mountains) and other physical features within the landscape, such as buildings, vegetation, water features. Potential visual impacts within the viewshed may be affected by distance of the viewer from a site, the frequency and length of views, the personal perception of the viewer, and physical and/or atmospheric conditions at the time viewing occurs.

A technical analysis was performed to determine the reasonable limits of the Project viewshed. A representative elevation (1,438 feet amsl) was selected within the onsite MUP development area, and electronic data from the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) and the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) was used to identify surrounding vantage points from which the Project site would be visible. The model takes into account the elevation of such surrounding vantage points relative to the Project site (e.g. higher elevation) and any intervening topography (e.g. mountains or other geologic conditions) in the line of sight that would block potential views of the proposed Project from that vantage point; however, the model does not take into account any intervening vegetation or development, or reduced visibility of the Project components due to distance. Therefore, although Figure 8, Viewshed/Landscape Unit Map, identifies potential vantage points from which the site would be visible with regard to topography, many such views would, in reality, be obscured with consideration for other physical elements or characteristics within the actual built landscape. The analysis was intended to provide a base from which the viewshed boundaries for the Project could be defined. The final viewshed boundary, as shown on Figure 8, was also defined by taking into account distance from the Project site.

As such, the viewshed is generally defined by the surrounding mountainous topography that encircles the site to the south and east, with consideration for distance to the Project site within the setting of the valley, with flatter lands to the west and north that restrict potential views due to the relatively flat viewing plane (similar elevation as the Project site). Consideration of this

viewshed provides a comprehensive and conservative estimate of the area that could potentially be affected by the proposed Project. Refer to Figure 8, Viewshed/Landscape Unit Map, which shows the viewshed in the area surrounding the Project.

Within the viewshed, varied views of the valley floor would occur from vehicles as they descend into the valley (or ascend and look back to the valley) or travel along roads within the valley. Visitors utilizing public recreational trails or other recreational facilities within the surrounding area at higher elevations may also have varied views of the valley floor. Due to existing topography, the Project viewshed includes the surrounding, low-density development and undeveloped lands along the valley floor, generally bounded by the surrounding hillsides. As a result of the generally flat topography of the valley floor and the limited, low-lying vegetation typical of the local natural and man-made environment, views across the valley from surrounding vantage points within the viewshed may occur, particularly in areas that support agricultural uses such as row crops or pasture lands; however, distance from the object being viewed and intervening development, vegetation, and topographical features have the potential to greatly reduce or obscure such views. Figure 8, Viewshed/Landscape Unit Map, shows the general limits of the viewshed and the landscape units considered within the viewshed as part of this analysis.

### 3.3 Landscape Units

A landscape unit is an area that can generally be defined by visual and physical characteristics and may be composed of a limited area (i.e., meadow) or a larger area (i.e., portion of a mountain range). The overall boundaries of a landscape unit may generally be defined by topography, natural vegetation, architectural design, landforms, or similar types of land uses. Each landscape unit can be described individually and as varying from other adjacent landscape units. Each landscape unit is a portion of the regional landscape that often corresponds to a place or district that is commonly known among local viewers.

As described above, the Project site is located along the valley floor with the mountains to the south and east, as well as flatter lands to the north and west, generally forming the boundary of the Project viewshed. The landscape units considered are located within this boundary and represent development patterns or unique elements within the viewshed. Landscape Units are shown in Figure 8, Viewshed/Landscape Unit Map, and described below.

### 3.3.1 Landscape Unit #1

Landscape Unit #1 is represented by the large-acre lands actively utilized for agriculture, generally located to the south/southeast/east of the community of Ramona. This Landscape Unit is generally bounded by the outlying reaches of the more developed areas of Ramona and lower-density development to the north/northwest, and various mountains rising from the valley floor to the east and south. Topography within this Landscape Unit is relatively flat, due to its use for agricultural production. Lands within this Unit visually contrast with the surrounding arid environment with regard to the type and color of vegetation they support, based on the seasons and the types of agricultural uses (e.g. row crops, nurseries, etc.); refer to Figure 8.

### 3.3.2 Landscape Unit #2

Landscape Unit #2 is defined as the areas to the east/south/southeast of the Ramona community where lower density residential uses generally occur as one moves away from the central core of Ramona, while bounded to the north by larger-acre rural lands, to the west by the higher density development of the Ramona community, and/or bordering on lower-density agricultural lands to the south/southeast/east (Landscape Unit #1). This landscape unit generally consists of larger-acre parcels with a mixture of rural-type single-family residential uses, often mixed with small- or large-scale agricultural operations, and limited industrial and commercial uses also occurring at lower densities on larger-scale parcels. Vegetation is generally varied and can range from a variety of agricultural crop types, to natural vegetation, to more ornamental vegetation (typically associated with residential uses). Lands within this landscape unit are generally flat, due to the location along the valley floor and the types of land uses they support.

### 3.3.3 Landscape Unit #3

Landscape Unit #3 consists of the largely undeveloped lands to the west/southwest of the Ramona community. This Landscape Unit is generally bounded by the mountains to the west and south and the lower density development along the valley floor to the southeast/east. Topography is generally flat, and vegetation typically consists of natural scrub and low-lying grasses and areas that are highly disturbed.

### 3.3.4 Landscape Unit #4

Landscape Unit #4 consists of the slopes to the southwest/south/east of the Project site. This Landscape Unit is generally defined by the varied slopes themselves rising above the valley, with the limits of the Landscape Unit created where the slopes meet the flatter lands of the valley floor. The Landscape Unit is bordered by the largely undeveloped lands that lie to the west/southwest of the Ramona community (Landscape Unit #3) and the large-acre lands actively utilized for agriculture, generally located to the south/southeast/east of Ramona (Landscape Unit #1).

This Landscape Unit supports varied topographical components that combine in unique patterns to offer visual diversity and contrast with adjacent lands of the flatter valley floor. Vegetation is generally low-lying scrub vegetation, with few significant stands of natural vegetation; however, ornamental landscaping is typically present on lands where scattered low-density residential uses occur.

## 4.0 Existing Visual Resources and Viewer Response

### 4.1 Existing Visual Resources

Land affected by the proposed Project is generally lacking in significant visual resources. The parcel does not contain any County-defined steep slopes (defined as having a slope with a natural gradient of 25 percent or greater and a minimum rise of 50 feet) or other significant topographical features. Topography of the Project area (and adjacent lands) is generally flat. Refer to Figure 2, Local Vicinity Map/Key Viewpoint Locations, and Figures 5 and 6 which show the existing onsite conditions.

No prominent natural drainage features occur on the affected parcel; an existing 18-inch culvert is located within the Project site, approximately 300 feet west of the existing onsite animal raising facilities. A limited number of small rock outcroppings (generally 10-30 feet in diameter) are present along the eastern parcel boundary and generally along the alignment of an onsite drainage; however, these areas are generally located outside of the MUP boundary. Refer to Figure 4, Photo Location Map.

The majority of the MUP area currently supports active agricultural operations (dry farming/pasture), as well as portions of fallow agricultural lands that do not represent vegetative habitat of high aesthetic value. The central portion of the site (not included under authority of the MUP) supports a livestock raising facility supported by three main structures (steel barns), with a number of supporting agricultural structures clustered around the main buildings; refer to Figure 3A, Major Use Permit Plot Plan (Sheet 1 of 3). Limited vegetation is present within this portion of the site. The developed area onsite is not included as part of the MUP and would therefore remain in their present state following Project implementation.

#### 4.1.1 Visual Character/Visual Quality

The dominant visual character of the Project site is that of generally level topography supporting similar vegetation [dry farming (oat hay) and pasture lands]. Views from Warnock Drive are largely dominated by the existing row crops and pasture lands in the northern portion of the site



that are generally visually similar in nature with regard to color, height, and pattern. Views from Ramona Street would also be similar and would consist of the onsite field crops/pasture lands. As the disturbed/developed area of the site is distanced from this roadway, views to this portion of the site would be limited.

## Landscape Unit #1

Within the Project viewshed, Landscape Unit #1 is represented by the large-acre lands actively utilized for agriculture, generally located to the south/southeast/east of the community of Ramona. This Unit is generally characterized by undeveloped lands, lands utilized for agricultural purposes, and lands with low-density development. This Landscape Unit supports expanses of natural vegetation typical of the environment, including low-lying scrub, sparse groundcover, and annual grasses, as well as a mixture of agricultural crops.

Topography within this Landscape Unit is visually flat, due to its use for agricultural production, creating a pattern with limited variation. Limited elements with visual bulk, dominance, or scale occur within this landscape. Lands within this Unit are generally similar with regard to color, due to the vegetation they support.

The components within this Landscape Unit do not offer a high degree of visual contrast with each other, due to the nature of the agricultural lands, and therefore, do not combine to create distinctive visual patterns. The landscape has a moderate degree of intactness, as it is generally free from competing visual elements. In addition, a sense of visual unity is evident, as the landscape components join together to generally form a coherent visual pattern. Overall, visual quality is considered to be low.

## Landscape Unit #2

Within the Project viewshed, Landscape Unit #2 is generally defined as the areas to the east/south/southeast of the Ramona community where lower density uses generally occur as one moves away from the central core of the Ramona community. This landscape unit generally consists of larger-acre parcels with a mixture of rural-type single-family residential uses, often mixed with small- or large-scale agricultural operations, and limited industrial and commercial uses also occurring at lower densities on larger-scale parcels.

Vegetation is generally varied and can range from a variety of agricultural crop types, to natural vegetation, to more ornamental vegetation (typically associated with residential uses). Lands within this landscape unit are generally flat, due to the location along the valley floor.

As much of the vegetation and topography are similar throughout this area, landscape components do not generally offer strong, visually distinctive patterns to viewers, particularly when viewed at a distance. This Landscape Unit does not offer strongly contrasting landscape components that combine to form striking or distinctive visual patterns, and therefore, a memorable visual impression is generally not created. The landscape is largely free from encroachment of competing visual elements, and is therefore visually intact. A sense of visual unity is achieved, as components combine to form a generally visually coherent pattern. As views of this landscape unit would be afforded at a distance, overall visual quality is generally considered to be low.

### Landscape Unit #3

Within the Project viewshed, Landscape Unit #3 consists of the largely undeveloped lands to the west/southwest of the Ramona community. This Landscape Unit is generally bounded by the mountains to the north and west and supports larger-acre parcels that are undeveloped with scattered lower-density development along the valley floor. Topography is generally flat. This Landscape Unit is largely defined by undeveloped lands supporting established vegetation typical of the natural environment, including sparse groundcover and annual grasses; refer also to Figure 8.

As the majority of lands within the valley are generally undeveloped, few built components within this Landscape Unit contribute to a sense of bulk or mass. Visual color is generally unvaried and consists of earthtoned, natural components (sand, native grasses, etc.). As such, lands within this Landscape Unit generally do not create a strong visual pattern.

This Landscape Unit does not offer strongly contrasting landscape components that combine to form striking or distinctive visual patterns, and therefore, a memorable visual impression is generally not created. The landscape is largely free from encroachment of competing visual elements, due to the nature of the topography and existing vegetation, and is therefore visually intact. A sense of visual unity is achieved, as components combine to form a generally visually coherent pattern. As views of this landscape unit would be afforded at a distance, overall visual quality is generally considered to be low.

Landscape Unit #4 Within the Project viewshed, Landscape Unit #4 consists of the slopes to the southwest/south/east of the Project site. This Landscape Unit is generally defined by the varied slopes themselves rising above the valley, with the limits of the Landscape Unit created where the slopes meet the flatter lands of the valley floor.

This Landscape Unit supports varied topographical components that combine in unique patterns to offer visual diversity and contrast with adjacent lands and the valley floor. The topography of this Landscape Unit offers visual forms with varied visual bulk, mass, and shape. Colors are also varied, based upon viewing distance to the forms, sunlight and time of day, and texture of the surfaces.

This Landscape Unit offers a sense of vividness and creates a memorable visual impression through varied topographic forms, particularly when influenced by sunlight. The slopes offer a unified and generally coherent visual pattern with few encroaching elements as they rise from the valley floor.

## 4.2 Viewer Response

Viewer response is based on both viewer sensitivity and viewer exposure. These elements influence how a viewer may potentially respond to a change in the visual landscape, particularly with regard to development of a site from a generally undeveloped condition. Viewer response varies based upon the type of viewer and the characteristics of the visual environment that would ultimately be affected (i.e., urban versus rural environment, established large-scale commercial area versus low density residential uses, etc.). Viewer response is largely influenced by viewer sensitivity and viewer exposure, as described in greater detail below.

### 4.2.1 Viewer Sensitivity

Viewer sensitivity to a change in the visual environment can be influenced by a number of factors, including the awareness of the viewer, personal interest in a particular visual resource, and/or viewer activity during the time that views of a resource occur (i.e., vehicle driver versus passenger, active versus passive viewing). In addition, the particular goals or values of a community can influence the sensitivity of viewers to a particular site, land area, or viewshed. Viewer sensitivity may vary between those with a vested interest in a community (i.e., residents) versus those traveling through an area with little or no knowledge of the community

or existing visual landscape. Based on these conditions, viewer sensitivity can be assigned a value of low, medium, or high.

It is likely that community members would be more sensitive to the proposed Project than would those who experienced Ramona as a visitor. In addition, viewer sensitivity may be higher among those who would experience views of the site more frequently, such as area residents or commuters who would travel through the Project area, particularly those using Warnock Drive, Ramona Street, or (future) Dye Road, on a frequent basis on their way to other destinations (e.g. for purposes of work). As views of the Project components would also vary due to distance from the site, as well as travel speed and the degree to which one chooses to make an effort to view the site (e.g. turning of one's head), viewer sensitivity would further be influenced. It should be noted that posted speeds along Warnock Drive and Ramona Street are 50 miles per hour (mph), and therefore, both roadways support a moderate level of traffic traveling at high speeds.

## 4.2.2 Viewer Groups

Viewer groups would mainly consist of those individuals traveling along Warnock Drive and Ramona Street, as well as (future) Dye Road, which would afford direct views of the proposed MUP area. Additional viewer groups from surrounding public vantage points would include residents of and visitors to the Ramona area, as well as travelers along other public roadways, particularly at higher elevations along the hillsides.

As stated above, a number of recreational areas exist within the Ramona community and surrounding areas. Those utilizing public trails within these areas (e.g. local residents and/or visitors to the area) would potentially experience intermittent views of the valley floor from varied public vantage points. Additionally, future users of the 10-foot wide (maximum) path along Warnock Drive and Ramona Street would also have the potential to experience views of the MUP area.

Additional viewer groups may include residents and/or occupants viewing the Project site from surrounding residential uses (particularly at a higher elevation than the site) to the north/northwest and south; agricultural uses to the south, southwest and west, and/or, properties directly adjacent to the Project site; however, such views of the Project from these vantage points would generally occur from privately-owned properties and not public viewpoints. Views from these private ownerships would largely occur at a distance from the

Project and would be decreased due to distance and intervening vegetation and development within the landscape.

### 4.2.3 Viewer Exposure

Views into the Project site from vehicles traveling along Warnock Drive and Ramona Street, as well as (future) Dye Road, would vary, and would be somewhat brief, largely due to travel speeds and the angle of the view with respect to the viewer (i.e., forward-looking versus turning one's head and looking back towards the subject property). Views of the site from other area public roadways (e.g. Royal Vista Drive to the west, Keyser Road to the northeast), or other roads at a greater distance, may also occur intermittently. Viewer exposure from these roadways would vary, due to distance from the site, intervening topography, development, and/or vegetation, and length of time the Project is actually visible from a particular location along the road.

In determining the exposure of each viewer group, several factors are considered. These include the number of viewers experiencing visual changes to the resource as the result of the proposed development, how long views would last, the anticipated speed at which viewers would be traveling, and the relation and distance of the viewer to the particular site.

Table 4, Viewer Groups and Anticipated Exposure, summarizes the anticipated viewer groups and the potential viewing experience of each.

**TABLE 4  
VIEWER GROUPS AND ANTICIPATED EXPOSURE**

<b>Anticipated Viewer Group</b>	<b>Number of Anticipated Viewers</b>	<b>Key Views</b>	<b>Distance to the Project Site</b>	<b>Anticipated Views with Project Implementation</b>	<b>Sensitivity</b>	<b>Duration of View</b>
Drivers along Warnock Drive	Estimated 500-1,000 people per day	#1 and #2	Adjacent	Solar panels and associated infrastructure screened from view by proposed landscaping	Medium	Estimated 10 -15 seconds
Drivers along Ramona Street	Estimated 500-1,000 people per day	#3	Adjacent	Solar panels and associated infrastructure screened from view by proposed landscaping	Medium	Estimated 10-15 seconds
Drivers along (future) Dye Road	Estimated 500-1,000 people per day	#4	Adjacent	Solar panels and associated infrastructure screened from view by proposed landscaping	Medium	Estimated 10-15 seconds
Other public roadways within valley	Varied	N/A	Varied	Potential intermittent views of solar panels and associated infrastructure	Varied	Varied depending on distance to site and intervening topography, development and vegetation
Swartz Canyon County Park, Cleveland National Forest, Blue Sky Ecological Reserve, San Pasqual County Park, other designated public recreational/open space areas	Estimated 200 to 400 people per day (depending on season)	N/A	Varies	Varied land uses (Ramona and surrounding land areas)	Low	Generally obscured due to distance to the site and intervening topography /vegetation

#### 4.2.4 Viewer Awareness

Viewer response is affected by the degree to which a viewer is receptive to visual details, character and quality of the surrounding landscape. A viewer's perception is affected by his/her activity and the degree to which he/she actively participates in noticing a change in the visual environment.

Viewer awareness to potential visual changes in the setting that may occur with the Project would be varied. A viewer would first need to be in a location within the surrounding area where the Project site was visible (e.g. from a higher elevation), then actively notice that a change in the visual landscape has occurred. Viewer awareness would also vary between local residents and those who are experiencing the area as a visitor, wherein the local residents would likely be more aware of a change in the visual environment. In addition, viewer awareness would also vary due to distance from the proposed facilities, as views occurring at a greater distance would diminish the visibility of the Project components within the landscape.

# 5.0 Visual Impact Assessment

## 5.1 Guidelines for Determining Significance

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines define “environment” to include “objects of...aesthetic significance (Section 15360).” As such, the County of San Diego has identified thresholds of significance to assess potential impacts resulting from proposed development.

The following significance guidelines are intended to provide guidance in the evaluation of whether a significant impact to visual resources would occur as a result of project implementation. A project will generally be considered to have a significant effect if it proposes any of the following:

- ⌘ Introduction of features that would detract from or contrast with the existing visual character and/or quality of a neighborhood, community, or localized area by conflicting with important visual elements or the quality of the area (such as theme, style, setbacks, density, size, massing, coverage, scale, color, architecture, building materials, etc.) or by being inconsistent with applicable design guidelines;
- ⌘ Removal or substantial adverse change of one or more features that contribute to the valued visual character or image of the neighborhood, community, or localized area, including but not limited to landmarks (designated), historic resources, trees, and rock outcroppings;
- ⌘ Substantially obstruct, interrupt, or detract from a valued focal and/or panoramic vista from a public road, a trail within an adopted County or State trail system, a scenic vista or highway, or a recreational area;
- ⌘ The project would not comply with applicable goals, policies or requirements of an applicable County Community Plan, Subregional Plan, or Historic District’s zoning; or,
- ⌘ The project would install highly reflective building materials, including but not limited to, reflective glass and high-gloss surface color that would create daytime glare and be visible from roadways, pedestrian walkways, or areas used frequently for outdoor activities on adjacent properties.



## 5.2 Key Views

Several key views of the Project site from surrounding public vantage points were identified for the Project; refer to Figure 2, Local Vicinity Map/Key Viewpoint Locations, and Figures 11 through 13, which illustrate existing and proposed views of lands affected by the Project. It should be noted that the visual simulations prepared for the Project provide a technical representation of what the Project components would look like within the surrounding landscape. The visibility of the proposed components, specific viewing angle, and the perspective experienced by the individual viewer would vary and would be influenced by travel speed, distance from the development area, viewer awareness and response, and other factors. All visual simulations were prepared using a highly-technical approach that reflects the proposed site topography following proposed Project grading and accurately models the Project components within the visual setting with consideration for the physical dimensions of each structural element, site topography, view location, and the overall Project design (e.g. setbacks, distance between the panel rows, etc.).

As the Project site is located in the valley where terrain is generally flat, views to the site from surrounding locations along the valley floor do not occur or are highly restricted due to similar elevation. As one begins to ascend the surrounding hillsides, the potential for the Project site to become more visible would increase; however, as the hillsides are distanced from the Project site, views of the site would decrease due to distance, intervening development, topography, and established vegetation. As such, the key views considered in this analysis are those that would occur to travelers along the adjacent roadways of Warnock Drive and Ramona Street, (future) Dye Road. As described below, views of the Project from these key vantage points would largely be influenced by travel speeds and angle of the view (i.e., looking directly to the site or turning one's head to look back to the site).

### 5.2.1 Key View # 1- Warnock Drive (Looking Southwest to Project Site)

Views of the Project site would occur to travelers looking south/southwest into the site from along Warnock Drive; refer to Figure 11, View 1 (Visual Simulation) – View from Warnock Drive, which shows the existing view from the roadway. Viewers from this location would mainly be passengers in vehicles traveling in either direction along Warnock Drive.

Views along this roadway within the Project vicinity generally consist of the portions of the site currently utilized for row crops and pasture lands. As lands along this roadway within the valley are generally flat, views within the area are typically limited to the immediately adjacent properties, as views across the valley or to the surrounding hillsides are generally restricted by intervening development and/or established vegetation. Depending on the time of year, views experienced by the viewer may vary with regard to the condition (e.g. color, texture, pattern) of the onsite fields. Views generally extend across the site, as there is no substantial vegetation, fencing, or other development that screens views from the roadway. The existing visual landscape offers somewhat memorable landscape components and distinctive visual patterns (although similar to other area agricultural uses), and therefore, visual quality and character are considered to be medium.

From this vantage point, views of the Project would be relatively brief, lasting approximately 10-15 seconds in length. Views would be afforded of the proposed development within the middle ground, as no PV solar panels are proposed within the foreground; refer to Figures 11 and 12. The Project as proposed has been designed to distance the development away from the roadway to reduce the appearance of the Project components within the landscape. At its closest point to Warnock Drive, the PV solar panels would be located approximately 400 feet from the parcel boundary; refer to Figure 3A, Major Use Permit Plot Plan (Sheet 1 of 3), and Figure 11, View 1 (Visual Simulation) – View from Warnock Drive. As one travels further to the west along the roadway, the PV panels would be located at an even greater distance from the roadway, or approximately 640 feet from the parcel boundary. Additionally, as designed, the proposed PV solar panels would reach a maximum of 11.5 feet above ground surface, thereby minimizing their height within the visual landscape, and would be screened along the northern and western MUP area perimeter via proposed landscaping. Where landscape screening is proposed, an 8-foot high chain link fence or 8-foot high vinyl-coated chain link fence would be installed in combination with varied vegetative screening along certain varying segments. Views of proposed landscape screening from this vantage point would be of a combination of vines and trees, along an 8-foot high vinyl-coated chain link fence. Structural elements/buildings of much greater height on the property are represented by the existing agricultural (animal keeping facilities) currently present onsite, outside of the MUP area.

Additionally, surrounding lands support structural elements associated with agricultural operations that are generally utilitarian in nature (metal barns, storage facilities, animal keeping structures, grain silos, etc.), similar to that which are proposed with the Project. As such, the introduction of the proposed PV solar panels within the visual landscape (screened by proposed

landscaping) would not represent a new element that would significantly differ from such existing structural elements. Although views to the site would change as one travels along the roadway, viewer response is anticipated to be medium, due to travel speeds and the limited amount of time that views would occur along the property frontage. It is not anticipated that installation of the Project components would significantly heighten viewer response or detract from the existing visual quality or character.

### 5.2.2 Key View #2 - Warnock Drive/Ramona Street (Looking Southeast to Project Site)

Views of the Project site would occur to travelers looking northeast across the Project site from Warnock Drive, generally at its intersection with Ramona Road, would experience views across the majority of the MUP area; refer to Figure 12, View 2 (Visual Simulation) – View from Warnock Drive/Ramona Street, which shows the existing view from the roadway. Viewers from this location would mainly be passengers in vehicles traveling in either direction along either Warnock Drive or Ramona Street.

Views from this vantage point are generally defined by existing intermittent development along the west side of Ramona Street and the north side of Warnock Drive, as one looks south to east. As lands along this roadway within the valley are generally flat, views are typically limited to the immediate vicinity, as views across the valley or to the surrounding hillsides are restricted by intervening development and landscaping; however, intermittent views of the surrounding valley and the hillsides in the background may occur while traveling along the roadways where such physical components are not present. Similar to Key View #1, depending on the time of year, views experienced by the viewer may vary with regard to the condition of the onsite pasture lands. Views generally extend across the site, as there is no substantial vegetation, fencing, or other development that screens views from the roadway. The existing visual landscape offers somewhat memorable landscape components and distinctive visual patterns, and therefore, visual quality and character are considered to be medium.

From this vantage point, the western portion of the site where pasture lands and grazing occur would be visible in the foreground, with limited views of the existing agricultural (animal raising) facilities in the background. As the Project components would be located even further back from the parcel boundary than in the eastern portion of the site (approximately 400 feet), views would be further reduced to travelers along the roads. The existing pasture lands would remain in the foreground of the view, with the panels providing a backdrop. Proposed landscape

screening would be visible along the Project perimeter fencing and would include segments of shrubs and/or trees and vines against either an 8-foot high chain-link fence or an 8-foot high vinyl-coated chain-link fence to minimize views into the development area; refer to Figure 3C. Additionally, travel speeds along these roadways, combined with the requirement to actively maneuver one's vehicle around the corner at the intersection, would be anticipated to reduce the length of views into the site at this location.

### 5.2.3 Key View #3 – Ramona Street (Looking Northeast to Project Site)

Views of the Project site from Key View #3 would occur to travelers generally travelling north along Ramona Street, looking east across the affected parcel; refer to Figure 13, View 3 (Visual Simulation) – View from Ramona Street, which shows the existing view from the roadway. Viewers from this location would mainly be passengers in vehicles traveling along the roadway.

Views are of the existing pasture lands located in the western portion of the site. Similar to that described above, lands along this roadway within the valley are generally flat, and views are typically limited to the immediate vicinity; however, intermittent views of the surrounding valley and the hillsides in the background may occur while traveling along the roadway. Similar to Key Views #1 and #2, depending on the time of year, views experienced by the viewer may vary with regard to the condition of the onsite pasture lands. Views generally extend across the site, as there is no substantial vegetation, fencing, or other development that screens views from the roadway; however, limited topographical differences provide limited screening of views to the site from this vantage point, as shown in Figure 13. The existing visual landscape does not offer memorable landscape components or distinctive visual patterns, and therefore, visual quality and character are considered to be low.

From this vantage point, the western portion of the site where pasture lands and grazing occur would be visible in the foreground, with views of the PV solar panels further to the east. The existing agricultural (animal raising) facilities would be visible at a greater distance in the background. As the Project components would be stepped back from the roadway, with the closest point of development occurring at approximately 390 feet, with the northwestern most development area located at approximately 840 feet from the parcel boundary, thereby distancing the viewer from the Project components as one travels northward along the roadway and reducing views of the components. The existing pasture lands would remain in the foreground of the view, with the PV solar panels visible in the middle ground. Proposed

landscape screening would be visible along the Project perimeter fencing and would include segments planted with vines along an 8-foot high vinyl-coated chain-link fence to minimize views into the development area; refer to Figure 3C. Additionally, the limited height of the panels, as viewed across the proposed MUP area from this location would further reduce the visibility of the Project within the landscape.

#### 5.2.4 Key View #4 – (Future) Dye Road Alignment (Looking East to Project Site)

The current alignment of Dye Road intersects with Ramona Street near the southwest corner of the subject property. Dye Road would be extended by the County across the northwestern portion of the 110-acre subject property as a future Capital Improvements Project; refer to Figure 3A, Major Use Permit Plot Plan (Sheet 1 of 3). The Project has been designed to accommodate this future roadway alignment through the property. The County would be responsible for constructing the road. Viewers from this location would mainly be passengers in vehicles traveling along the roadway.

Views from this (future) location are of the existing pasture lands located in the western portion of the site. Similar to that described above, views from this vantage point are typically limited to the immediate vicinity due to the relatively level viewing plane of the valley, although limited views of the hillsides in the background may occur. Views experienced by the viewer may vary with regard to the condition of the onsite pasture lands. Similar to views from Ramona Street, views generally extend across the site to the east and west, as there is no existing vegetation, fencing, or other development that would screen views from this roadway. The existing visual landscape does not offer memorable landscape components or distinctive visual patterns, and therefore, visual quality and character are considered to be low.

Similar to views from Ramona Street, views from this vantage point would be of the western and northern portions of the PV solar panels, with views of the existing agricultural (animal raising) facilities in the background; however, those traveling in vehicles along the roadway would potentially experience closer views of the Project components as compared to those along Ramona Street or Warnock Drive. The development area would be stepped back from the roadway along portions of the alignment (e.g. in the northern portion), while portions of the panel field would be located closer to the roadway (30 feet at the closest point). Several undeveloped portions of the site (not a part of the MUP area) would also be adjacent to the road; however, as landscape screening is proposed along the western and northern portions of

the perimeter fence adjacent to the (future) road, views would be of the proposed vegetation and views into the panel field would be restricted.

## 5.3 Assessment of Visual Character and Visual Quality

### 5.3.1 Assessment of Visual Character

Natural landforms, natural vegetation, and a mixture of small- and large-scale agricultural, industrial, commercial, and rural single-family residential uses, as well as large parcels of undeveloped land exist in the area surrounding the Project; however, such visual components would generally not be adversely affected by the proposed development. The Project has been designed to avoid grading (with exception of limited grading for perimeter access in the eastern portion of the site along the existing SDG&E easement), requiring only clearing and grubbing, thereby leaving the natural topography of the site largely in its existing condition within the surrounding landscape.

Construction would occur on the site and would generally be limited in visibility to surrounding parcels, and from Warnock Drive, Ramona Street, and (future) Dye Road. The Project would change the composition of the visual pattern in the existing onsite setting as the onsite physical character (i.e. presence of native vegetation, colors, visual diversity) would be altered with installation of the PV solar panels and associated facilities; however, with consideration of varied views to the site from offsite properties and travelers along nearby public roadways, the visual changes resulting from the Project would not dominate or substantially change the existing visual pattern of the area, nor would the Project incorporate elements that would substantially obstruct or diminish existing views within the valley; refer also to Figures 6 and 7 which illustrate views of the Project from surrounding public vantage points.

Similar industrial, agricultural, and commercial type elements exist within the surrounding area and support structural elements of similar or greater size, height, and/or appearance. Such elements may include large barns, oat hay storage canopies, facilities for animal keeping/raising, grain silos, and other similar structures. As visibility of the site would be limited due to relative distance of the proposed facilities from the adjacent public roadways as designed, an adverse change to the overall character of the existing visual pattern through the introduction of elements that would create visual dominance or scale is not anticipated with the Project; refer

also to Figures 11-13 which show the proposed Project as built within the landscape. Landscape screening would further reflect the visual character of the surrounding rural setting. The proposed Project would not significantly change the overall visual character of the landscape, as the structural elements would be of limited height, bulk, mass, and scale, and views would generally occur from a distance, and screened by proposed vegetation.

### 5.3.2 Assessment of Visual Quality

The visual quality of a view is partially influenced by the viewing location from which public views occur. The viewing location can allow for views that are generally either expansive in nature or focused on a specific view of a site or particular feature within the landscape. In addition, visual quality is influenced by the particular characteristics of the viewing corridor within which a view occurs. Visual quality is also affected by the quality of the overall viewshed area being viewed. Areas identified as having high visual quality are those which are identified as being sub-regionally important and possessing high scenic value.

The visual quality of lands affected by the Project would be potentially affected during the construction phase of the Project. Views of the site from adjacent properties and public roads would include grubbing/clearing/grading and construction activities, presence of construction vehicles and workers, and storage of building materials; however, potential construction impacts on visual quality would be temporary and short-term, and would ultimately be eliminated once construction is complete. Following the construction phase, no other development or improvements are proposed; however, landscaping would be installed that would continue to mature over time, thereby further enhancing views of the site.

As mentioned previously, the Project site presents a landscape that is generally visually intact, and due to the nature of the onsite vegetation (row crops/pasture lands) and the existing visual character of adjoining lands, is generally considered to have an overall sense of visual harmony with adjacent lands. Visual diversity is generally low, as views largely consist of the crops and pasture lands (of similar color and height), with limited elements or features that would disrupt the visual landscape, and no visually significant natural or topographical features. Views of the site from along Warnock Drive and Ramona Street would be somewhat limited, largely due to distance of the Project elements from the parcel boundary and posted travel speeds; views from (future) Dye Road would occur at a closer vantage point. The area affected by the proposed Project is generally void of any significant natural vegetation (due to existing agricultural activities) or other landscape components of visual significance and is not considered to possess

landscape components that create distinctive visual patterns or possess high visual quality, nor is it considered to be subregionally important or possessing a high scenic value. As the lands affected by the Project would be cleared and grubbed/graded (limited), onsite vegetation within the MUP area following Project implementation would be minimal. As landscape treatments are proposed with the Project, the visual quality would be enhanced following completion of the construction phase through the maturing of trees, shrubs, and vines along the northern/western boundaries of the perimeter fence over time. As the existing visual quality of the affected parcels is not considered to be high and landscape screening is proposed, installation of the PV solar panels would not significantly reduce the overall existing visual quality of the Project site or of surrounding lands.

## 5.4 Assessment of Viewer Response

Viewer response to visual changes on the Project site with development of the PV solar facilities is anticipated to be varied, dependent upon the Project facilities being viewed and the location of the public vantage point. Viewer response during the construction phase may be greater because grading activities, construction equipment, and varying stages of panel installation may be visible from public roads within the Project vicinity. Once construction is completed, no other development or improvements are proposed; however, landscaping installed for screening purposes would continue to mature over time, resulting in visual changes in the appearance of the Project site.

The PV solar facilities installed in the northern portion of the site along Warnock Drive would be located approximately 400 feet from the roadway at the closest point. As such, the development would be distanced from the road and not readily visible to those traveling along the roadway, particularly to those traveling to the west. Such distancing, combined with the overall limited design height of the panel systems and landscape screening along the northern perimeter of the development area, would restrict potential views of the PV solar panels within the visual landscape. Viewer response to views of this area of the Project would be low, due to distance, perimeter landscape screening, and travel speeds.

Viewer response to Project-related facilities along Ramona Street is also anticipated to be low. The PV solar facilities installed in this portion of the site would be located approximately 390 feet from the roadway at the closest point as designed. Similar to views along Warnock Drive, viewer response to improvements made in this area of the Project site are anticipated to be low, due to distance, perimeter landscape screening, and travel speeds.



It should be noted that with future construction of the Dye Road alignment through the site, as shown on the County of San Diego General Plan Circulation Element, travelers along this road would be closer to the Project development area, and therefore, experience greater exposure and increased viewer response; however, proposed landscape screening mechanisms would be employed to restrict potential views to the development area. Visual impacts resulting from the future extension of Dye Road and the resulting viewer response are herein considered to be speculative and would be assessed again by the County at the time when the roadway is constructed.

Viewer response from other public vantage points within the valley or from public roadways located at a distance is also anticipated to be low. Views to the Project site from locations within the surrounding area would generally be reduced or blocked due to intervening development and minimal differences in elevation (generally flat viewing plane). Viewer response from more distant locations would also be low, as the Project would not represent a significant visual feature within the landscape due to distance, and existing vegetation and development along the valley floor.

## 5.5 Determination of Significance

- 1) Introduction of features that would detract from or contrast with the existing visual character and/or quality of a neighborhood, community, or localized area by conflicting with important visual elements or the quality of the area (such as theme, style, setbacks, density, size, massing, coverage, scale, color, architecture, building materials, etc.).

The proposed Project is not subject to the Ramona Design Guidelines, and therefore, Project conformance with such guidelines is not discussed herein. As noted previously, a discussion of Project conformance with the County General Plan Update, Ramona Community Plan, and County Zoning Ordinance is provided in Appendix A, Project Conformance with Applicable Plans, of this report.

### Location / Lot Size

The Project area is located within the rural community of Ramona, in north-central San Diego County. In the Project vicinity, parcels are generally large-acre parcels with low-density residential and/or agricultural uses; refer to Figure 2, Local Vicinity Map/Key View Locations. The majority of surrounding parcels are large-acre ownerships that support small- and large-

scale agricultural operations, some of which have associated single-family residential uses. A number of smaller parcels are generally located to the northwest/north/northeast of the Project site, across Warnock Drive, and support smaller-scale agricultural operations mixed with single-family residential uses. Smaller lot sizes supporting development at higher densities are evident within the more developed areas of Ramona to the northwest.

The Project does not propose to subdivide or change the existing size of the parcel affected by the proposed improvements. Therefore, the Project would not create lot sizes that are inconsistent with the existing visual character of lands in the surrounding area.

## Architectural Design

Architectural design of structures within the land areas surrounding the Project is varied, due to a mixture of use types. Residential uses in the area typically exhibit ranch-style features with wooden exteriors and roofing, and generally non-decorative elements. A number of visible residential uses are constructed in the Spanish style, with stucco exteriors, tile roofing, and arched features. Surrounding agricultural and industrial uses generally exhibit more utilitarian features with minimal architectural design.

The Project would involve installation of the PV solar panels, with supporting infrastructure that includes small-scale structures to house the inverter/distributor transformers and switching gear. Architectural design of the proposed facilities is not anticipated to significantly contrast with the visual character of other uses found in the surrounding area (e.g. agricultural), as the Project is a utility use. Project components would be utilitarian in nature and would not represent structural features that would require detailed architectural design or design features intended for visual enhancement. The architectural design of Project elements would not result in features that are visually dominant within the visual landscape, or that would significantly contrast with the existing visual character.

## Materials and Colors

Surrounding land uses exhibit a variety of materials and colors, depending on the land use considered. Materials generally range from wood, stucco, and concrete block for residential and commercial uses. Metal and/or stucco structures are typical of surrounding and agricultural-associated and industrial-type elements. Exterior colors of surrounding structures are typically earthtoned and/or muted in nature.

### Solar Panels

The PV solar panels would be manufactured at an offsite location and transported to the Project site. The panels would be either mono-crystalline or poly-crystalline silicon cell modules and would be black in color and highly absorptive to minimize or the potential for glare and/or reflection of sunlight that may affect views from adjacent or surrounding land uses within the area.

### Inverter Enclosures

Approximately seven small-scale, aboveground structures would be constructed within the solar panel fields to weatherize inverter/distributor transformers and switching gear. The structures would be constructed of non-flammable materials (i.e., steel) with an earthtone finish to reflect typical exterior colors used on the exterior of surrounding land uses and to reduce the potential for the reflection of sunlight and resulting glare effects to occur.

Overall, the Project would result in the construction of elements within the landscape that would be respective of the existing visual character with regard to materials and color. No design features are proposed that would sharply visually contrast with the existing exterior character of surrounding development on adjacent lands.

### Height / Square Footage

Residential and commercial uses on surrounding lands generally range between one to two stories in height. Industrial-type and/or agricultural uses on surrounding lands support structural elements that generally range from 10 to 30 feet in height, with various elements of greater height (e.g. barns, grain storage), depending on their function.

Square footage of buildings in the area varies, due to the type of use, with residential uses generally of smaller scale (generally one to two stories) and industrial and agricultural uses supporting structures of greater square footage.

### Solar Panels

The panels would be rack-mounted three-wide, measuring approximately 9.5 feet across each row when flat (horizontal). When fully inclined to 45-degrees, the upper edge of the highest panels would be 8-11.5 feet from the ground surface depending on terrain. When flat, all panels would be 4.5-8 feet above the ground surface, depending on terrain; refer to Figure 3B, Major

Use Permit Plot Plan – Sheet 2 of 3. Therefore, the panels would generally be of lesser height than typical land uses found on surrounding lands.

The length of each row of panels would be approximately 150 feet along the east/west axis. Spacing between each row along the vertical axis would be approximately 15 to 29 feet.

Due to the limited height of the solar panels and the generally flat topography of the parcel, combined with proposed landscape perimeter screening, visibility of the panels within the landscape would be greatly reduced. Although residential land uses are located in the immediate area surrounding the affected parcel, views to the proposed MUP development area would generally occur at a distance due to proposed setbacks from the parcel boundary, and would therefore be reduced within the existing visual landscape.

#### Inverter Enclosures

The seven aboveground structures proposed to house the inverter/distributer transformers and switching gear would be approximately 11 feet by 36 feet in size (396 s.f.), and 11 feet in height (10-foot inverter constructed upon a one-foot platform) at the apex. As such, these structures would be relatively small in nature, and would not represent a size or height that would significantly contrast to existing land uses in the surrounding area (i.e., residential, industrial, agricultural uses, etc.).

#### Bulk and Scale

An evaluation of bulk and scale includes an analysis of the visual appearance of structures, relative to other existing development in the surrounding area. Visual bulk and scale of surrounding structures varies depending on the type of use. Residential uses tend to be of smaller scale (generally one to two stories in height) and visually horizontal in nature, while agricultural and industrial-type uses generally support structural elements of greater bulk and scale within the visual landscape.

It is anticipated that the apparent visual bulk and scale of the proposed Project facilities would be consistent with that of surrounding uses, due to the design requirements of the solar facilities and associated infrastructure, structural/equipment heights, and required development regulations of the applicable zones. As stated above, the solar panels would be rack-mounted three-wide, measuring approximately 9.5 feet across each row when flat (horizontal). When fully inclined to 45 degrees, the upper edge of the highest panels would be 8-11.5 feet from the

ground surface depending on terrain. As such, the solar panels would be low-lying and would not represent elements of significant scale within the visual landscape. Additionally, the panels would be pole-mounted and would be relatively thin, thereby reducing their visual bulk as compared to other structural elements within the landscape (e.g. residential or agricultural components). In addition, other structural elements (inverter enclosures) would be dispersed within the interior of the parcel and would be setback from adjacent roads or land ownerships. As these facilities would be relatively low-lying within the landscape and limited in height, they are not considered to be of significant scale that would be inconsistent with surrounding land uses or community character. In addition, these structural components would total approximately 396 s.f. each and would not be of significant visual bulk, due to their function and utilitarian design.

## Building Coverage

Building coverage is generally expressed as a percentage and represents the area of land covered by the footprint of a building. Building coverage is calculated as the building area divided by total lot area. The building footprint does not include paved areas, such as driveways or parking areas or walkways around structures, as defined by Section 1110 of the County Zoning Ordinance.

Many larger-scale undeveloped lands and lands utilized for agricultural purposes (pasture lands, dry farming, animal keeping, and equestrian-related uses) are present in the area surrounding the Project site, particularly to the northeast, south, and southwest of the Project site, and therefore, do not support buildings; refer to Figure 2, Local Vicinity Map/Key View Locations. The majority of surrounding developed lands are larger-acre parcels with structures of varied square footage, depending on the use (e.g., single-family residential, agricultural, industrial).

The Project includes construction of seven supporting inverter enclosures. Each enclosure (building footprint) would total approximately 396 s.f. overall, or 2,772 s.f. for all seven structures. As the total land area affected would be 42.7 acres, overall building coverage would be an estimated 0.15 percent (2,772 s.f. / 1,860,012 s.f.). As such, proposed building coverage would represent only a fractional portion of the affected parcel, and would not conflict with building coverage of existing land uses on surrounding lands.

The panels would be rack-mounted three-wide, measuring approximately 9.5 feet across each row when flat (horizontal). Spacing between each row along the vertical axis would be approximately 15 to 29 feet. Although from an aerial perspective, the panels would appear to

cover a substantial surface land area, the panels would be mounted on poles, thereby minimizing the footprint, or coverage, of each panel rack.

The appearance of the above-described Project elements within the landscape is not anticipated to significantly detract from or contrast with the existing visual character and/or quality of the surrounding neighborhood, community, or localized area. The Project would not conflict with other visual elements in the surrounding landscape with regard to density, size, massing, coverage, scale, color, architectural design, building materials, etc. No significant impacts would occur with the Project, and no mitigation is required.

- 2) Removal or substantial adverse change of one or more features that contribute to the valued visual character or image of the neighborhood, community, or localized area, including but not limited to landmarks (designated), historic resources, trees, and rock outcroppings.

No lands affected by the Project support designated landmarks, historic resources, or significant trees. Although a limited number of small rock outcroppings within the MUP area would be removed with the Project, these elements are not considered to lend significant value to the visual quality or character of the landscape. The majority of rock outcroppings onsite, particularly the larger ones, are located outside of the MUP area and would remain in their present natural state. Although the Project would result in the installation of the solar panels and associated facilities within the existing landscape, no significant visual resources would be affected by Project construction.

In addition, utility poles/lines are present along Warnock Drive, and replacement or retrofitting of such poles to support the Project is not required or proposed to allow for the transmission of power generated. Therefore, no substantial adverse changes in the existing visual character along this roadway would occur as a result of Project implementation.

The Project site is designated as a civic use type. The proposed use is allowed under the existing General Plan land use and zoning designations with County approval of a MUP and is therefore consistent with the land use intended for the property by the County. Although development of the site with the proposed PV solar facilities would change the onsite use from agriculture to a utility use, design measures are proposed (distancing the facilities from the roadways, perimeter landscape screening, Project elements of minimal height and scale, etc.), to ensure that the Project does not result in a significant impact on the existing visual setting, and that the rural character or image of the neighborhood is not adversely altered with Project implementation.

As such, the Project as proposed would not result in the removal or substantial adverse change of one or more features that contribute to the valued visual character or image of the neighborhood, community, or localized area. Impacts would be less than significant, and no mitigation is required.

- 3) Substantially obstruct, interrupt, or detract from a valued focal and/or panoramic vista from a public road, a trail within an adopted County or State trail system, a scenic vista or highway, or a recreational area.

The Project would not substantially obstruct, interrupt, or detract from a valued focal and/or panoramic vista from a public road, a trail within an adopted County or State trail system, a scenic vista or highway, or a recreational area.

Project construction activities (i.e., construction vehicles, equipment to be installed, etc.) would be temporarily visible on the Project site; however, the identified site occurs within a rural environment, with limited visual resources in the immediate surrounding area. Construction activities may be visible from area roadways and/or adjacent properties; however, such effects would be temporary and would cease upon completion of construction.

The proposed facilities would be constructed on disturbed/developed lands that support agricultural-type uses (animal keeping/fallow pasture land/dry farming). Land uses within the surrounding area include single-family residential, agricultural, and limited industrial-type uses. As stated above, the site is located along the valley floor and is therefore generally blocked from view from surrounding public roadways and privately-owned properties in the area, due to the relatively level topography. As one moves further from the site on roadways along the surrounding hillsides, views to the site may occur; however, such views would be distanced from the Project, and the visibility of the proposed facilities would be diminished within the landscape. Additionally, existing development and established vegetation would further reduce or restrict views to the site.

Several designated scenic highways are located within the Ramona area; refer to Table 3, Scenic County Highways. The segment of State Route 78 designated as scenic (approximately 1.9 miles north) lies outside of the defined Project viewshed and would therefore not offer views of the Project site. A portion of Highland Valley Road near its intersection with SR 67 is designated as scenic and lies within the Project viewshed; however, due to intervening topography, elevation differences, and distance from the site, the Project components would not be visible from this location; refer to Figure 9, Photo Survey – Offsite Photographs. Additionally, San Vicente Road runs approximately 0.25 mile east of the Project site; however, due to the relatively flat viewing

plane and intervening vegetation (large, dense eucalyptus grove of approximately 40 feet in height, adjacent to the Project site to the east), views of the site from this roadway would not occur. Refer to Figure 9, which shows views to the site from San Vicente Road. As identified previously, a number of public recreational areas are located within the Ramona area that offer hiking trails. These areas may include San Pasqual County Park, approximately six miles to the northwest; Swartz Canyon County Park, approximately four miles to the east; and, Blue Sky Ecological Reserve, approximately six miles to the west. Additionally, the Cleveland National Forest is located approximately seven miles to the north and 7.5 miles to the east. Views from such public recreational areas would be diminished due to distance from the proposed development and an overall visual blending of development on lands located within the valley floor (visual pattern). Several open space preserves are also located within the surrounding area and include Ramona Grasslands Open Space Preserve, approximately 2.2 miles to the northwest; Simon Open Space Preserve, approximately 2.1 miles to the east; and, Barnett Ranch Open Space Preserve, approximately 0.5 miles to the south; however, due to distance or intervening topography, views of the site would be obscured. Refer to Figure 8, Viewshed/Landscape Unit Map, and Figure 10, which show views from these locations. Due to the topography of the area and the highly varied geographic forms of the various surrounding mountains, views from public trails within designated public recreational areas in the surrounding area would be restricted by intervening landforms and established vegetation. Views from the Ramona Grasslands Open Space Preserve to the Project site would not occur, as the Preserve is located at a distance from the site, is generally flat, and is located outside of the Project viewshed. Views of the Project site from trails within the Barnett Ranch Open Space to the south would also not occur, as they would be blocked by the large ridge located to the south of the site; refer to Figure 10, Photo Survey – Onsite/Offsite Photographs.

Additionally, the Simon Open Space Preserve to the east offers a limited number of public trails along the relatively low-lying slopes. As seen on Figure 8, Viewshed/Landscape Unit Map, a portion of the trail within the very southern and northern areas of this Preserve are shown to be on the easterly edge of the area anticipated to have potential views of the Project site. Views of the Project site from the trail within the southern portion of the Preserve would be blocked due to the height and density of the extensive eucalyptus grove located to the east of the site, in addition to the relative height of the proposed Project elements within the landscape. As can be seen from Figure 10, views of this portion of the Preserve would not be visible from the far westerly property boundary, which represents the extreme viewing angle from which views from the southern portion of the Preserve to the site would extend.



Potential views from the trail within the northern portion of the Preserve may also occur; refer to Figure 8, Viewshed/Landscape Unit Map; however, the trail is located on the very easterly edge of where potential views of the site may potentially be experienced. In addition, such views would occur at a distance (closest point) of approximately 2.5 miles, thereby reducing the visibility of development along the valley floor. Furthermore, due to the height of the slopes, combined with the height and density of the extensive eucalyptus grove to the east of the Project site, the proposed setback of the MUP area from Warnock Drive, the viewing angle, and the limited height of the proposed Project elements within the landscape, the Project would not be visible from this public trail. As such, the Project would not substantially detract from or interrupt existing views from public recreational areas or from public trails in the areas surrounding the site. Refer to Figure 10, which provides photographs from the above-described locations.

The Project as designed also includes a 10-foot wide (maximum) cleared path along Warnock Drive and Ramona Street for pedestrian and/or other forms of movement. Views of the Project site from these paths would be similar to those experienced by passengers in vehicles traveling along these roads; however, views experienced would last longer, due to relative travel speed. Although views of the development area would occur from these paths, the MUP area would be set back at a distance from the edge of the roadway (approximately 390 feet at closest point) and would further be screened from view by the proposed landscaping along the northern and western perimeters, limiting views of the components. As such, the Project as designed would not substantially obstruct, interrupt, or detract from views from these paths. With consideration for the limited size and height of the solar panels, along with other built elements visible within the landscape along the valley floor, the visual effect of the proposed Project would be minimal, and views would not be significantly changed with Project implementation. Further, landscape screening is proposed along the northern and western perimeter of the MUP area and would screen views into the site from offsite public vantage points; refer to Figures 11 through 13. As such, it is not anticipated that the Project would substantially obstruct, interrupt, or detract from a valued focal and/or panoramic vista from a public road or a scenic vista or highway. In addition, views from established public recreational areas or trails would not be substantially obstructed or interrupted with development of the site as proposed, as the site would not be visible from such areas, or would occur at a distance from the site wherein the Project components would be visually diminished within the surrounding landscape. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant, and no mitigation is required.

- 4) The project would not comply with applicable goals, policies or requirements of an applicable County Community Plan, Subregional Plan, or Historic District's zoning.

The Project as proposed has been designed to be consistent with all applicable goals, policies and requirements of the County General Plan, Ramona Community Plan, and the County Zoning Ordinance. The Project is not within a Historic District, and is therefore, not affected by such a plan. As noted above, the proposed Project is not subject to the Ramona Design Guidelines, and therefore, Project conformance with such guidelines is not discussed herein. A discussion of Project conformance with the County General Plan Update, Ramona Community Plan, and County Zoning Ordinance is provided in Appendix A, Project Conformance with Applicable Plans, of this report. As such, Project impacts with regard to the significance criteria would be less than significant, and no mitigation is required.

- 5) The project will install highly reflective building materials, including but not limited to, reflective glass and high-gloss surface color that will create daytime glare and be visible from roadways, pedestrian walkways, or areas used frequently for outdoor activities on adjacent properties.

Viewers looking to the Project site from public or private roadways or other surrounding public vantage points would have the potential to experience panoramic views of the valley floor where the Project site is located. As such, the potential for the proposed Project to result in glare/glint effects that would detract from or contrast with the existing visual quality of the area would occur.

In order to effectively demonstrate that the proposed Project would not result in significant potential glare/glint effects from installation of the proposed Project as designed, an investigation previously conducted by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) for the installation of a 4-megawatt PV solar power generation array adjacent to Denver International Airport (DIA) in Colorado (in 2006) was evaluated. Airports represent a highly sensitive land use, and the potential for glare/glint effects to adversely affect airport safety and operations is great. As such, technical findings from this investigation were considered herein as a worst-case scenario for the Project to have potential glare/glint effects on surrounding land uses.

In the analysis conducted by the FAA, a number of tests were performed to analyze potential glare effects on the airport, such as placing sample PV solar panels at different installation locations and at variable angles. No glare was noted by observers in any of the panel orientations. An aerial observation was also conducted. Reflectivity of the panels was measured four times per day, concluding that 96 percent of the sun's light was absorbed by the panels, and

that the light reflected was dispersed. Since the panels were installed in August 2008, no complaints have been filed with DIA with regard to glare effects from the panels. A similar PV solar panel project was installed on the Express Hub at the Fresno Airport in Fresno, California. The project involved installation of flat plate PV modules and PV modules that capture and concentrate sunlight onto a solar cell which allow only reflected light from heat.

Other similar solar panel projects throughout the U.S. and globally have been installed near airports with no impacts on flight operations with regard to glare. Such locations include the Munich Airport in Germany; the Love Field Airport in Prescott, Arizona; and, the San Francisco, California Airport. Additional PV solar studies considered in this visual analysis for the proposed Project included the Panoche Valley Solar Farm Project Glint and Glare Study (Panoche Report)<sup>1</sup> and a Technical Memorandum provided by SunPower Corporation, (SunPower Report)<sup>2</sup>, both of which concluded findings of no significant adverse effects with regard to glare generated by PV solar panels.

Based on the above discussion and findings for glare/glint effects of similar solar PV panel installations, potential Project-related glare/glint effects experienced by viewers from area roadways, pedestrian walkways, or other areas frequently used for outdoor activities on surrounding properties are anticipated to be none to minimal, and no significant impacts are anticipated to occur.

As described under Significance Criteria #1 above, the PV solar panels as proposed would be either mono-crystalline or poly-crystalline silicon cell modules and would be black in color and highly absorptive to minimize the potential for glare and/or reflection of sunlight that may affect views from adjacent or surrounding land uses within the area. Additionally, the surface of the inverters would have an earthtone finish to reflect the surrounding natural environment and to reduce the potential for the reflection of sunlight and resulting glare effects to occur.

The proposed Project would be designed in accordance with the County's Guidelines of Determining Significance for Lighting and Glare. Overall, the Project would result in the construction of elements within the landscape that would be respective of the existing visual character and visual quality with regard to materials and color. The Project would not install highly reflective building materials such as reflective glass or high-gloss surface color that would

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<sup>1</sup> Panoche Valley Solar Farm Project Glint and Glare Report, prepared by Power Engineers, May 10, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> SunPower Corporation Technical Notification #T09014, Solar Module Glare and Reflectance, dated September 29, 2009.

create daytime glare or be visible from roadways, pedestrian walkways, or areas used frequently for outdoor activities on adjacent properties. No significant impacts with regard to glare or glint would occur with the proposed Project.

## 5.6 Cumulative Impact Analysis

Figure 14, Discretionary Permits, identifies the projects considered for the cumulative analysis. The study area selected for the Project generally includes those lands within proximity to properties affected by the Project. A list of projects considered for the cumulative analysis is included in Table 5, Cumulative Projects, below; however, as shown in Figure 14, only three projects are located within the cumulative study area boundary.

The cumulative study area was determined based upon the surrounding topography and potential views to the site from offsite public locations. The study area limits generally encompass the surrounding ridgelines with consideration for distance from the Project site. Viewers located on the downslopes facing away from the Project site would not have views of the proposed development due to topography. Additionally, locations within the valley on the lower slopes may have views to the site, but such views would be decreased by distance and intervening geologic conditions, as well as existing development and established vegetation (combined with proposed landscape screening). Table 5 reflects the current discretionary projects identified by the County of San Diego Department of Land Use for the Ramona area.

**TABLE 5  
CUMULATIVE PROJECTS**

Project ID on Figure 14	County DPLU Project Number	Project Name
	<b>TBD</b>	<b>Sol Orchard LLC – Ramona PV Solar Farm (Proposed Project)</b>
A	03-005, 5344	Cummings Ranch
B	21070	Dekoven Project TPM
C	09-005, 5560	McDonald
D**	5564	McCandless TM
E	08-017	Lutheran Church
F	21160	Johnson TPM
G	5554, 08-032, 71-396-01	Ramona Air Center
H	10-002	Ramona Downtown Wireless

\* Project number refers to locations as shown on Figure 14, Discretionary Permits.

\*\* Shaded projects are located within the Cumulative Projects Study Area.

Construction of currently approved and pending projects in the Project vicinity would permanently alter the nature and appearance of the area as future development occurs over upcoming years. Gradual buildout of the projects considered in the cumulative analysis would result in a change in the existing conditions over time; however, the change would not result in a significant impact as it would not substantially alter the overall visual landscape of the valley.

It is anticipated that future construction activities within the cumulative study area would occur on various sites and at varied times, when an application for development is made. Such construction-related impacts would be short-term and would cease upon completion. In addition, all new development projects within the cumulative study area would be subject to additional environmental and design review on a site-specific, project-by-project basis to ensure visual aesthetic impacts are limited to the extent possible during the construction process. All future construction activities would be required to be consistent with the County's regulatory requirements and applicable conditions of approval to reduce potential cumulative effects of construction to less than significant.

In addition, future development of the cumulative projects in the Project vicinity could permanently convert existing offsite open space or undeveloped lands to developed lands, potentially resulting in the incremental loss of visible open space within the Ramona community. Such future development could also contribute to the alteration of views to designated visual resources. All future development within the Ramona community would be subject to an evaluation of the significance of potential cumulative visual and aesthetic changes on a site-specific, project-by-project basis, with consideration for its scope and contribution to a change in the overall visual pattern or character.

The cumulative projects considered for the Visual Analysis are located throughout the Ramona area; refer to Figure 14, Discretionary Permits. All but three of the projects identified are not located within the proposed cumulative projects study area, due to area topography (e.g. valley floor) that would prevent views to the site, or distance from the Project site (greater than two miles), and therefore, would not contribute to a cumulative visual change within the viewshed.

Future development along the valley floor would have a similar visual effect as other types of development would have in that they would generally change undeveloped land to developed land. Over time, it is anticipated that development within the Ramona area would continue to occur.

As the valley floor is somewhat extensive, and the proposed Project site represents a minimal overall percentage of such lands, the proposed development is not expected to result in a significant visual change in the appearance of the valley floor when viewed from higher surrounding elevations. In addition, due to the limited height and scale of the proposed Project elements, combined with the proposed perimeter landscaping, the Project is not anticipated to contribute to a significant cumulative impact on existing views from locations within the valley, as such views would be further restricted by relatively flat topography, and intervening development and vegetation.

Assuming a complete buildout of all the projects considered for the cumulative analysis, potential aesthetic cumulative impacts are considered to be less than significant for the following reasons:

The proposed Project is not considered to result in the introduction of any features that would significantly detract from or contrast with the existing visual features of the surrounding area. Existing development in the Ramona area consists of a range of uses that includes agricultural, commercial, industrial, and residential uses. Development of the proposed Project in the land use mix would not conflict with the visual quality of the area because the development of the identified cumulative projects would be spread out and not concentrated in one area within the Ramona community. The projects considered are not anticipated to result in an overall disruption of the pattern of land development adjacent to existing homes or businesses, nor conflict with specific design guidelines or specific thematic development requirements within the Ramona area.

The addition of the cumulative projects considered would not remove or create a substantial adverse change to the features that represent a valued visual resource in the area. The valley floor would still be visible from higher elevations and would still appear to have a scattered development pattern once the cumulative projects are constructed. None of the projects are anticipated to significantly alter the mountain views from the valley floor from locations where such views currently exist. Additionally, the cumulative projects considered would not remove or replace any local or State designated landmarks.

The proposed Project would not substantially obstruct or detract from valued lookouts or panoramic views from public roads, scenic highways, or recreational areas. Buildout of the cumulative projects is not anticipated to result in an adverse effect on such public viewsheds because it is assumed that such projects would respect and reflect existing development patterns

in the valley, and would be reviewed for conformance with applicable General Plan land use and zoning designations regulating allowable uses and development character.

Moreover, the cumulative projects would be required to comply with applicable goals and policies of the County General Plan, Ramona Community Plan, and County Zoning Ordinance. Additionally, as required, specific analysis to demonstrate the compatibility of future projects would be required prior to approval by the County.

In addition, all lighting proposed with future development within the cumulative study area, such as street lighting, security lighting, or exterior illumination, would potentially result in increased light and glare impacts within the Ramona community. Projects within the cumulative study area would be evaluated by the County and the Ramona Community Planning Group on a project-by-project basis to determine the extent of such lighting necessary and any appropriate site-specific measures to reduce potential impacts on surrounding areas (i.e., shielding, use of low-level lighting, directing lighting away from adjacent properties and open space areas). As such, it is anticipated that the cumulative effects of increased lighting and/or glare associated with future development in the cumulative study area would be reduced to less than significant levels. As the Project would require minimal lighting for the purposes of security and maintenance, the Project would not contribute to significant cumulative impacts relative to light and/or glare. Impacts in this regard would be less than significant.

### Future Solar Projects

None of the projects considered include development of solar energy facilities, and therefore, would not contribute to a cumulative condition with regard to such development along the valley floor. As the Ramona area offers an environment with abundant sunshine, combined with available undeveloped lands that are generally flat, the area represents optimal conditions for the sighting of solar energy facilities in the future. If proposed, it is anticipated that any future installation of solar panels along the valley floor would occur sporadically on available parcels as independent development applications, rather than concentrated in one large area of the valley. Thus, the cumulative visual effects of such installations would be reduced, as a range of small-scale to larger-scale projects would likely be proposed, depending on available land, proper zoning, and the nature of the applicant. In addition, potential glare impacts on a cumulative level as the result of other solar energy facilities locating within the Ramona area would be less than significant. As all solar panels are designed to absorb sunlight, potential glare effects from future additional solar installations would not create significant glare or reflective surfaces that would create adverse effects on surrounding land uses or on views from surrounding vantage

points. Refer also to discussion under Section 5.5, Determination of Significance, Significance Criteria #5, above. All future development within the Ramona community would be subject to an evaluation of the significance of potential cumulative visual and aesthetic changes on a site-specific, project-by-project basis, with consideration for its scope and contribution to a change in the overall visual pattern or character within the community. Required adherence to applicable General Plan policies and goals and applicable Zoning Ordinance design standards would further reduce potential cumulative impacts relative to the long-term alteration of views to designated scenic resources. Although the Project would result in a permanent visual change in the existing landscape with development of the proposed PV solar farm, as demonstrated by evaluation of the visual simulations prepared, the Project is not considered to contribute to a significant cumulative effect with regard to the loss of views to scenic resources.

## 5.7 Summary of Project Impacts and Significance and Conclusions

The Visual Analysis was prepared to provide an evaluation of potential Project impacts on existing visual resources and character of the community of Ramona, California. With regard to visual resources, the Project would not result in the introduction of features that would significantly detract from or contrast with the visual character of the surrounding community by conflicting with visual elements or quality of an existing area (i.e., through conflicting style, size, coverage, scale, building materials, etc.). Further, landscape screening is proposed along the northern and western perimeter of the MUP area to screen views into the site from public offsite vantage points. The Project would not result in the removal of or substantial adverse change to one or more features that contribute to the valued visual character or image of the Project area, including but not limited to designated landmarks, historic resources, or trees. Although a limited number of small rock outcroppings within the MUP area would be removed with the Project, these elements are not considered to lend significant value to the visual quality or character of the landscape. The majority of rock outcroppings onsite, particularly the larger ones, are located outside of the MUP area and would remain in their present natural state. Furthermore, the Project would not substantially obstruct, interrupt, or detract from a valued focal and/or panoramic vista from a public road, trails within an adopted County or State trail system, scenic vista or highway, or recreational area. The Project as designed would also not result in an inconsistency with any goals, standards, or policies related to visual resources as given in the County General Plan, Ramona Community Plan, or County Zoning Ordinance.



For the above reasons, it was determined that the Project would not result in potentially significant impacts on visual resources in the Ramona community. Design measures have been incorporated into the Project design to reduce visibility of the Project elements and minimize potential adverse effects on the existing visual environment; refer also to Section 5.8, Visual Mitigation Measures/Design Considerations, below. As such, no mitigation measures are required or proposed.

## 6.0 Visual Mitigation Measures / Design Considerations

### 6.1 Visual Impact Analysis

The Project would not result in the introduction of features that would significantly detract from or contrast with the visual character of the Ramona community by conflicting with visual elements or quality of an existing area. In addition, the Project would not result in the removal of or substantial adverse change of one or more features that contribute to the valued visual character or image of the Project area, including but not limited to designated landmarks, historic resources, or trees. Although a limited number of small rock outcroppings within the MUP area would be removed with the Project, these elements are not considered to lend significant value to the visual quality or character of the landscape. Furthermore, the Project would not substantially obstruct, interrupt, or detract from a valued focal and/or panoramic vista from a public road, trails within an adopted County or State trail system, scenic vista or highway, or recreational area. The Project as designed would also not result in an inconsistency with any goals, standards, or policies related to visual resources as given in the County General Plan, Ramona Community Plan, or other applicable regulations and ordinances.

To reduce views of the project development within the existing landscape, design measures include buffering the Project from potential viewers along the public roadways of Warnock Drive and Ramona Street. Large setbacks are proposed along Warnock Drive (approximately 400 feet) and Ramona Street (approximately 390 feet) to distance the viewer from the development. Furthermore, the proposed panel system as designed would be kept to a minimal height (3-panel system of maximum height 11.5 feet above ground surface) to visibly reduce the panels within the existing landscape. Onsite structures (inverter enclosures) would also be constructed with an exterior surface that is earth-toned. Access to the affected parcel would be provided through a secured gate and identified by minimal signage, rather than decorative or otherwise highly visible design features. Although the Project would change the visual character of the affected parcel, the proposed facilities would be consistent with development intended for the properties as indicated by the existing General Plan land use and zoning designations, and would be visually compatible with other existing uses in the surrounding area which support structural elements or design characteristics (i.e. materials, colors, scale, mass, height, etc.)

greater than or similar to that associated with the Project. These measures are considered to be design measures, rather than mitigation measures, to reduce the visibility of the Project within the existing landscape.

Through this Visual Resources/Aesthetics Analysis, potential effects of the PV Solar Farm Project were evaluated against the thresholds of significance developed by the County of San Diego. The Project is considered to be compatible with the existing character of the surrounding Ramona community and would be consistent with applicable County and community land use regulations with regard to visual and aesthetic resources. For the above reasons, no significant impacts on visual resources/aesthetics are anticipated to occur with Project implementation, and no mitigation measures to reduce potential impacts are required or proposed.

## 7.0 References

County of San Diego General Plan.

County of San Diego General Plan Update. Adopted August 3, 2011.

County of San Diego Guidelines for Determining Significance and Report Format and Content Requirements – Visual Resources. July 30, 2007.

County of San Diego Zoning Ordinance. Updated with Ordinance Update No. 80, October 2009.

County of San Diego Wildland Urban Interface Ordinance. Ordinance No. 9670.

Ramona Community Plan. Adopted August 3, 2011.

Panoche Valley Solar Farm Project Glint and Glare Report, prepared by Power Engineers, May 10, 2010.

SunPower Corporation Technical Notification #T09014, Solar Module Glare and Reflectance, dated September 29, 2009.

## 8.0 Report Preparers

### 8.1.1 RBF Consulting

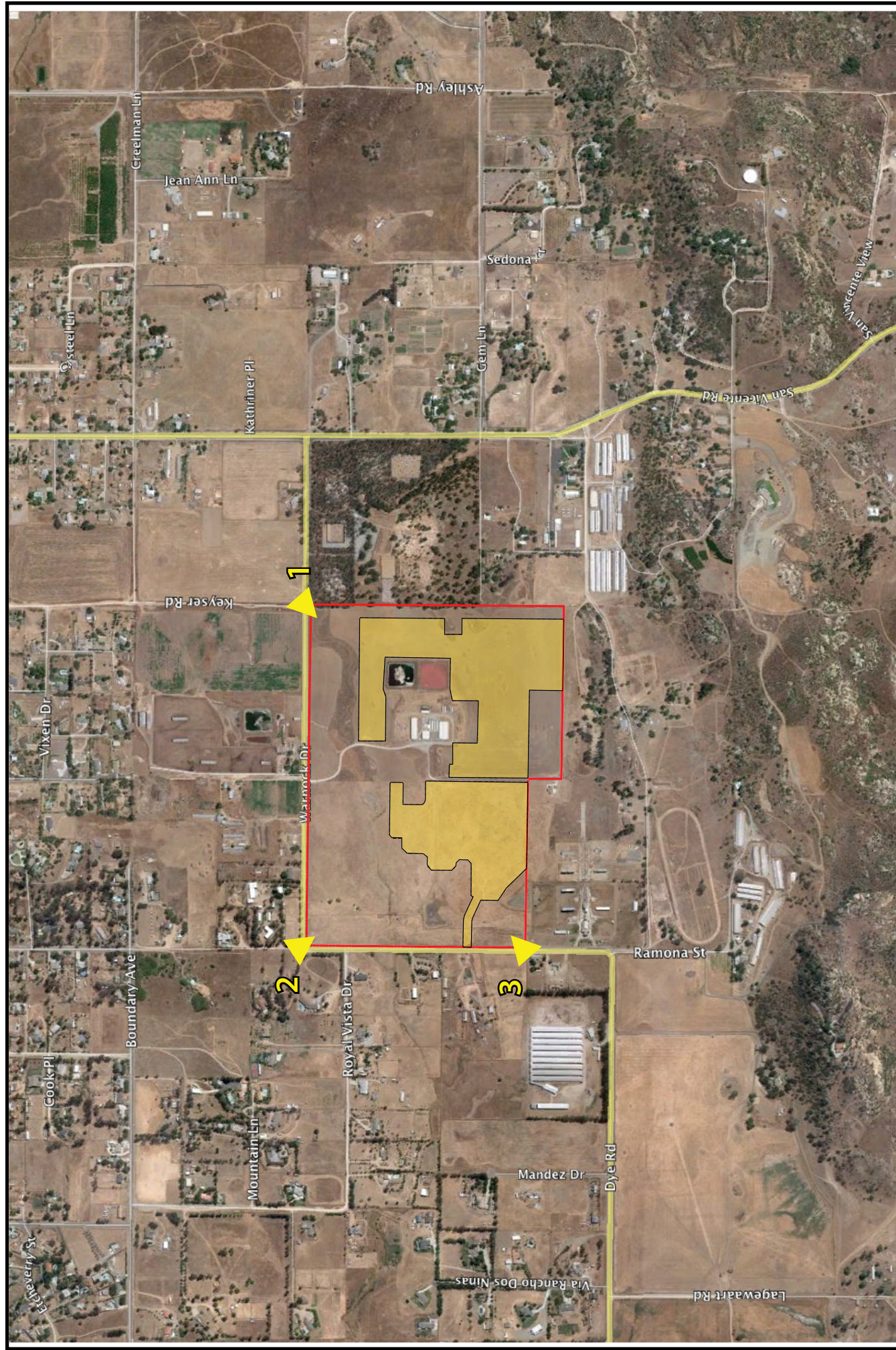
Alex H. Jewell, AICP, LEED AP  
Environmental Project Manager  
*County-Certified Preparer for Visual Impact Analyses*

Nicole Marotz, AICP, LEED AP  
Senior Environmental Planner  
*Primary Author of Visual Impact Analysis*

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SOL ORCHARD - RAMONA

## LOCAL VICINITY MAP/ KEY VIEWPOINT LOCATIONS

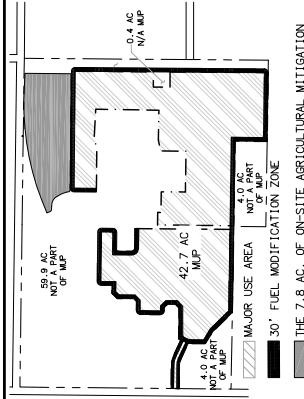
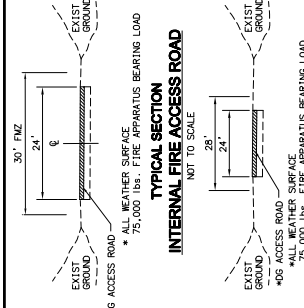
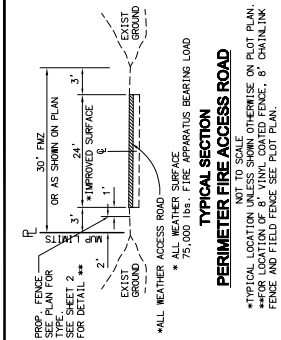
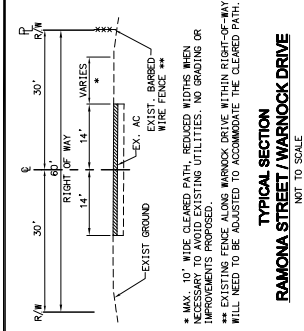
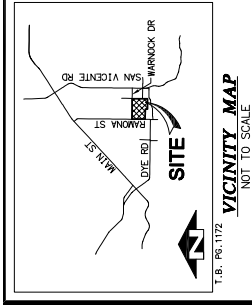
Figure 2

- MUP Boundary
- Parcel Boundary
- Key View



Source: Eagle Aerial Imagery





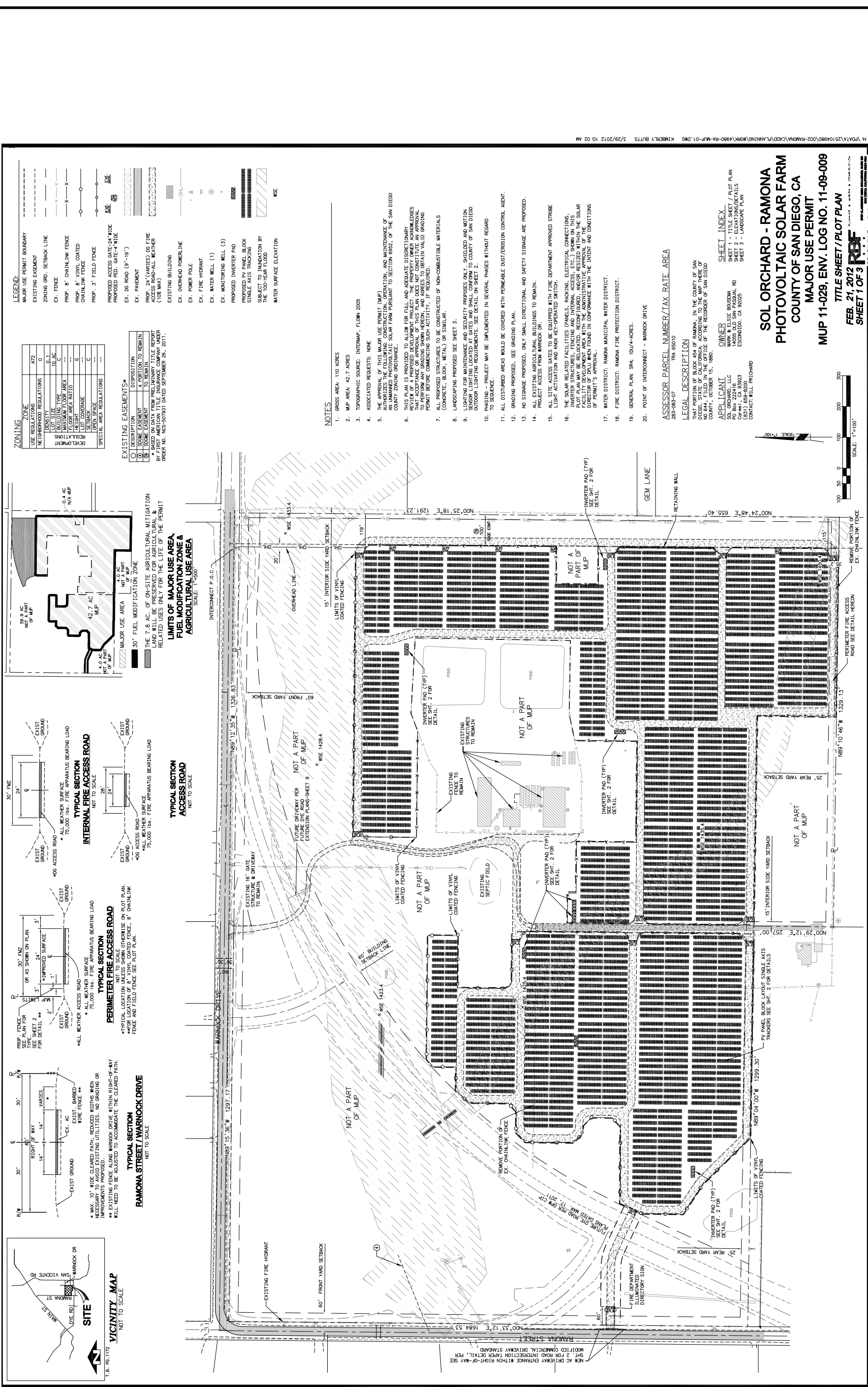
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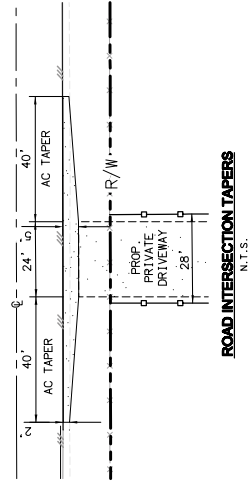
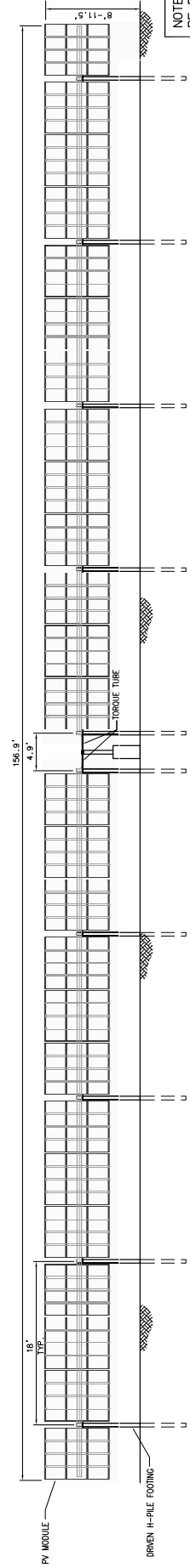
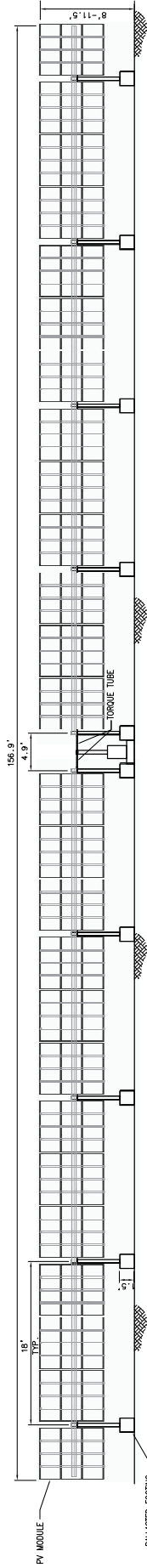
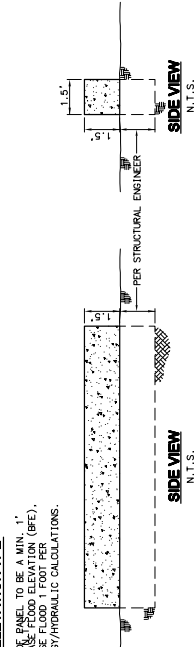
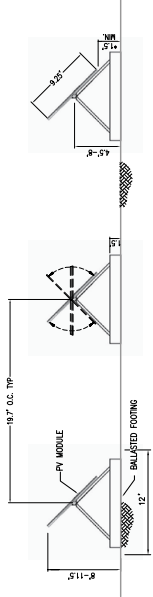
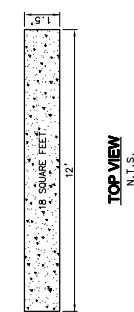
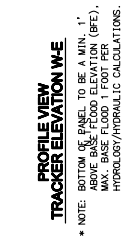
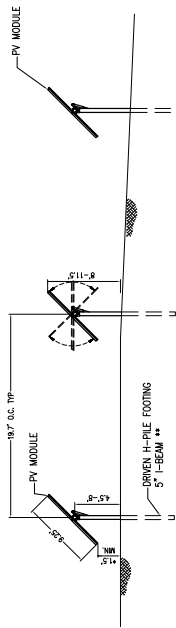
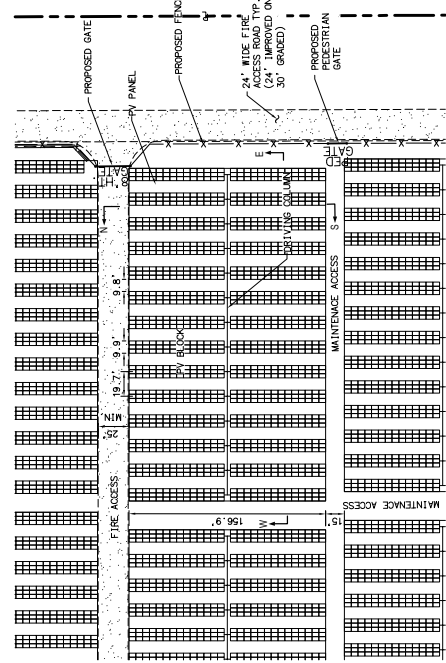
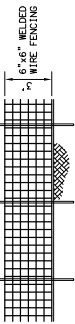
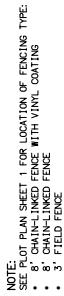
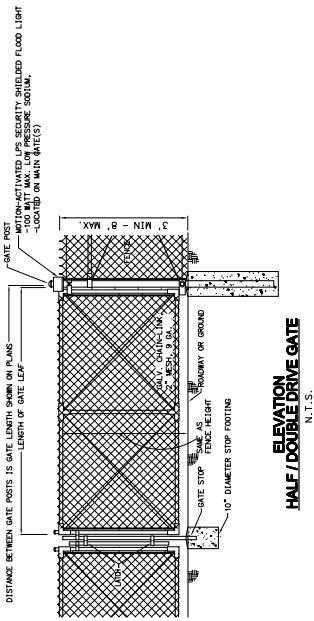
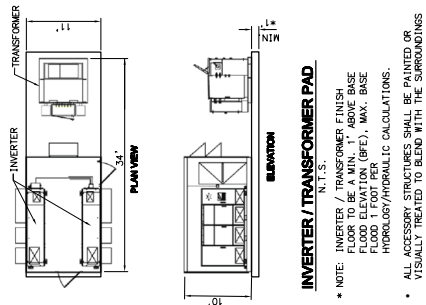
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**LEGEND**

DESCRIPTION	DISPOSITION
30' FUEL MODIFICATION ZONE	TO REMAIN
30' FUEL MODIFICATION ZONE	TO REMAIN
30' FUEL MODIFICATION ZONE	TO REMAIN

\* BASED ON DATA FROM PRELIMINARY TITLE REPORT BY FIRST AMERICAN TITLE INSURANCE COMPANY UNDER ORDER NO. NCS-507851 DATED SEPTEMBER 26, 2011.





**SOL ORCHARD - RAMONA  
PHOTOVOLTAIC SOLAR FARM  
COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO, CA**

**MAJOR USE PERMIT**  
**MUP 11-029, ENV. LOG NO. 11-09-009**  
**ELEVATIONS/DETAILS**  
**FEB. 21, 2012** **DOT** **PLANNING & DESIGN & CONSTRUCTION**

**FEB. 21, 2012**  
**SHEET 2 OF 3**

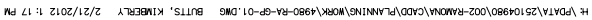
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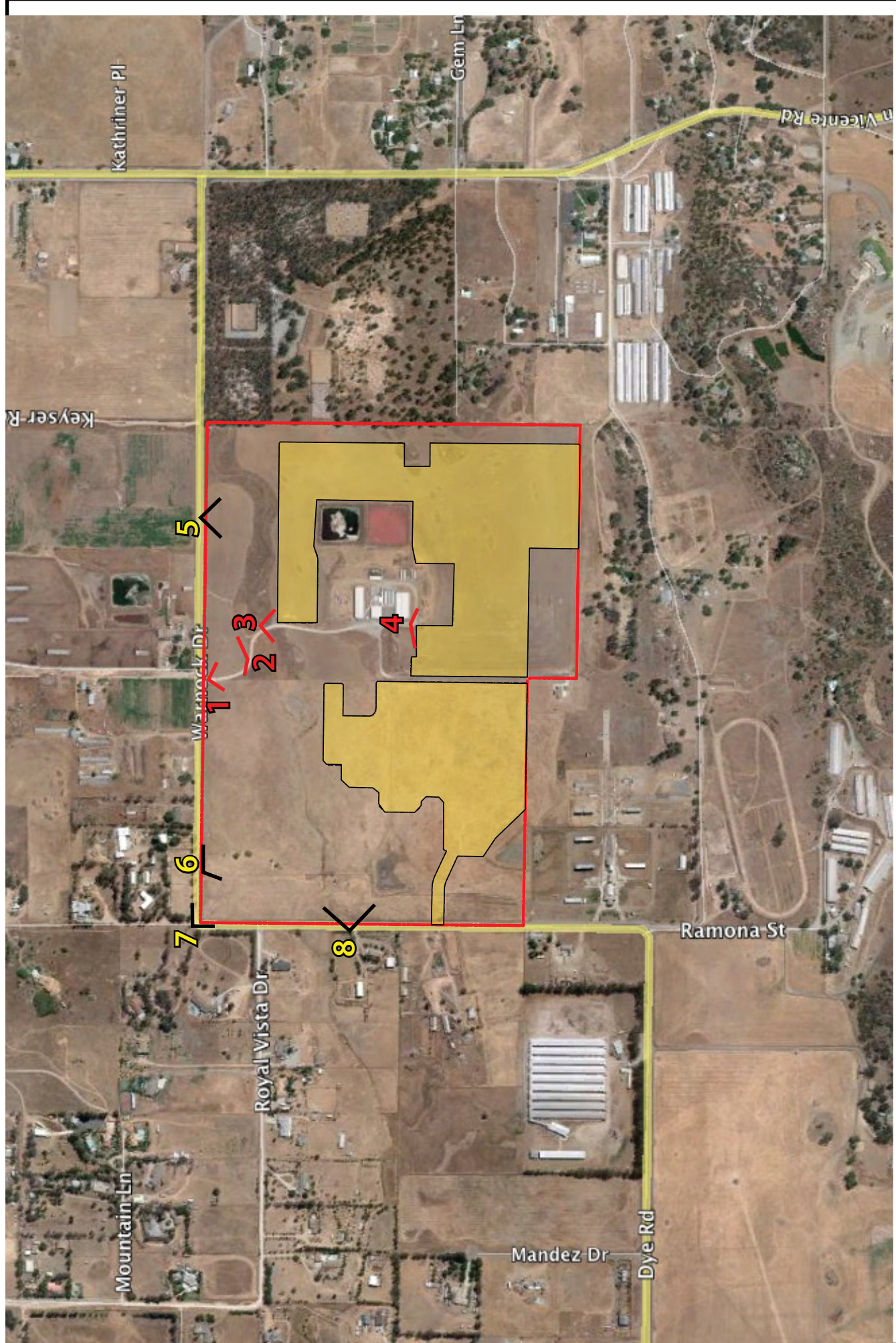












# SOL ORCHARD - RAMONA EXISTING VIEWS - KEY MAP Figure 4

1 Onsite View  
5 Offsite View

MUP Boundary  
Parcel Boundary





Photo 1: View Looking East-West to MUP Area from Existing Access Gate.



Photo 2: View Looking North to Adjacent Land Uses Across Warnock Drive from Existing Access Drive (no views of PV solar panels).



Photo 3: View Looking East-Southwest to MUP Area from Existing Access Drive.





Photo 4: View Looking East-North from Southern Edge of Existing Disturbed/Developed Area.



Photo 5: View Looking Southeast-Southwest to MUP Area from North Side of Warnock Drive.



Photo 6: View Looking Southeast-South Across Proposed MUP Area from North Side of Warnock Drive.



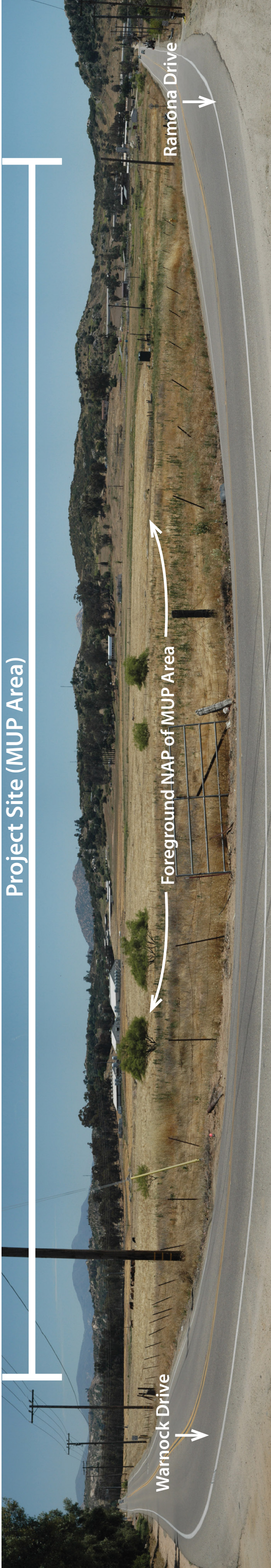
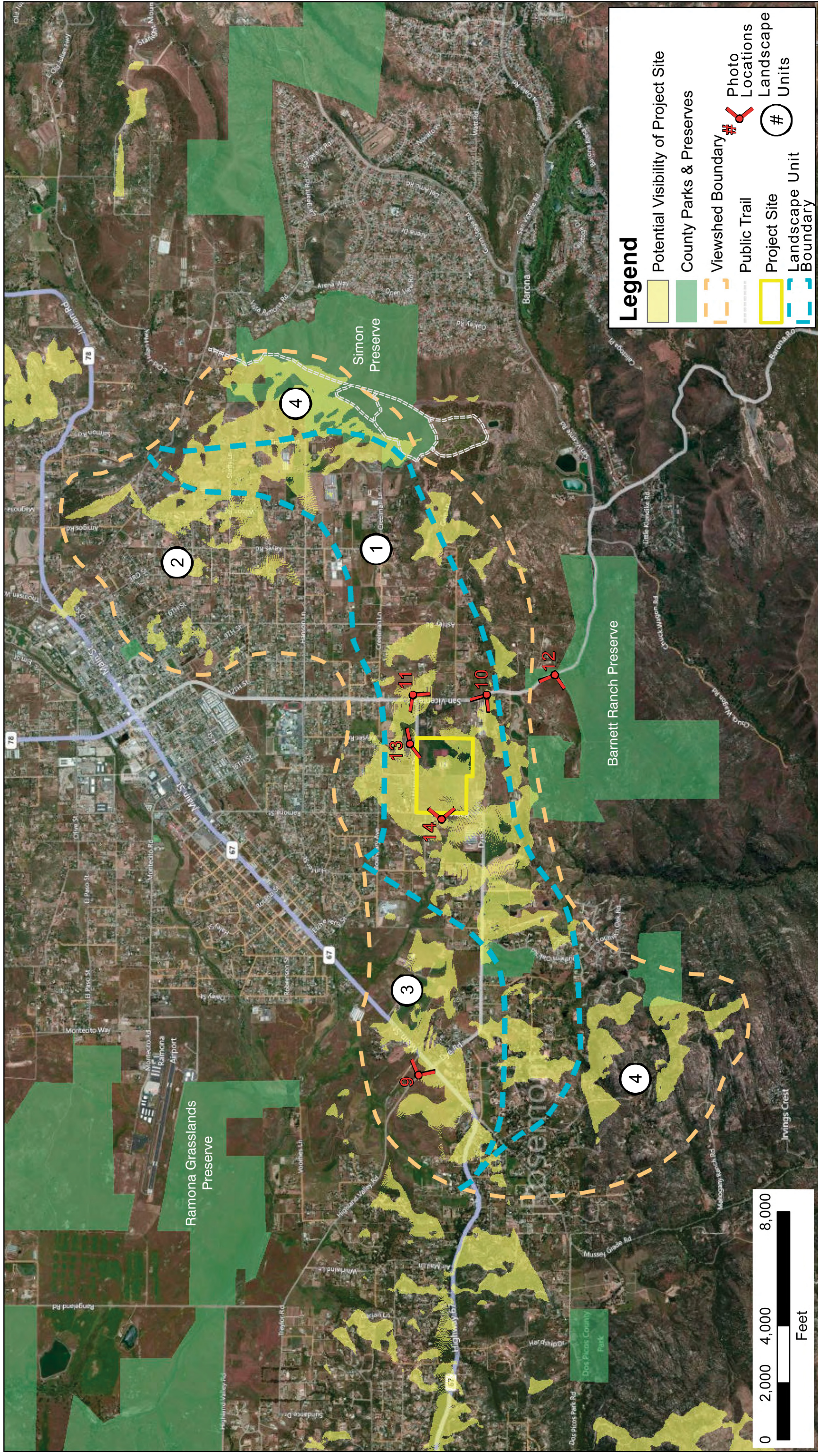


Photo 7: View Looking East-South to Project Site from Intersection of Warnock Drive and Ramona Street.



Photo 8: View Looking Northeast-Southeast Across Project Site from Ramona Street.





Sol Orchard - Ramona

## Viewshed / Landscape Unit Map

Figure 8





Photo 9: View looking East to Southeast from Highland Valley Road near SR 67.



Photo 10: View Looking West/North from San Vicente Road.



Photo 11: View Looking South to West from Warnock Drive/San Vicente Road towards Project Site.





Photo 12: View looking North/Northwest from Barnett Open Space Preserve Staging Area (Project Site Obscured).

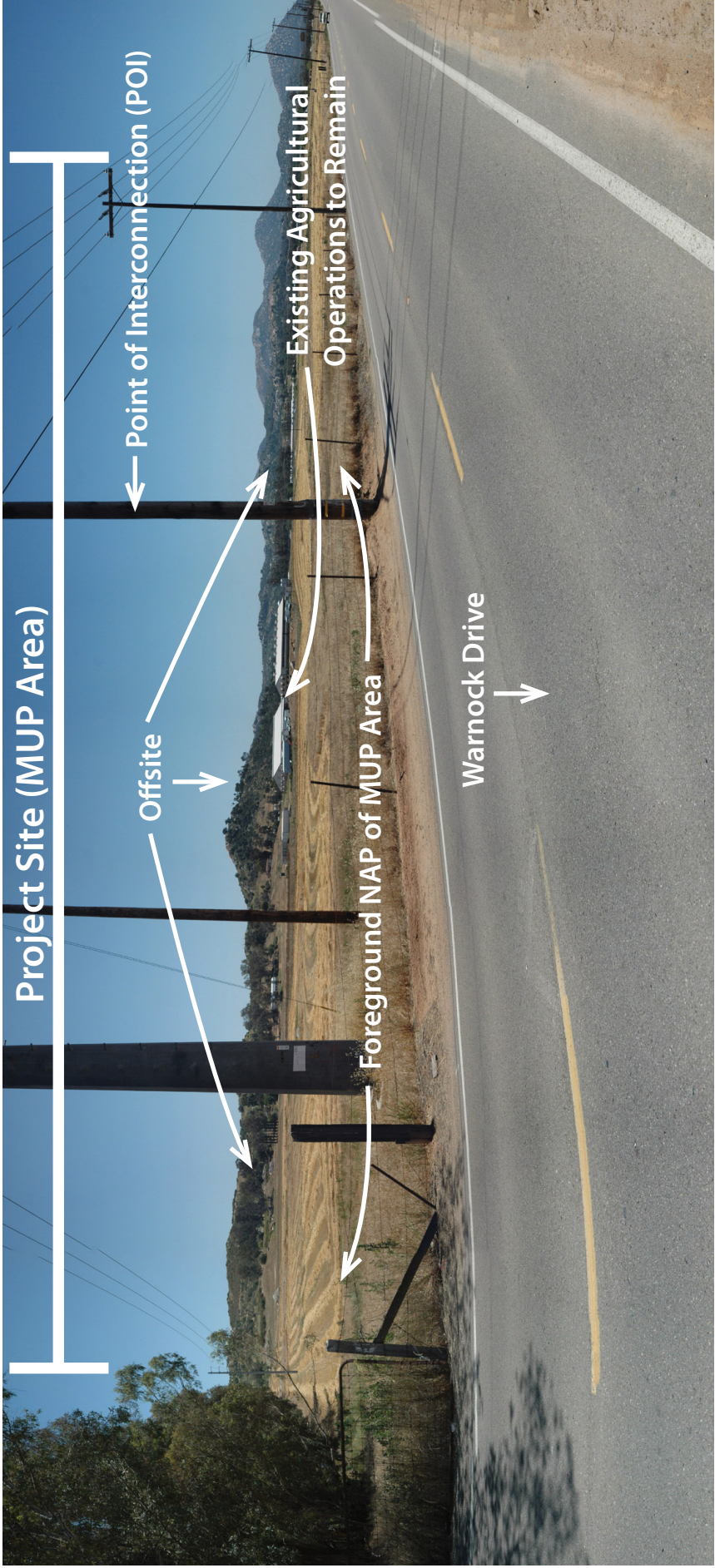


Photo 13: View looking East/Southwest from Eastern Boundary of Subject Parcel towards Simon Open Space Preserve.

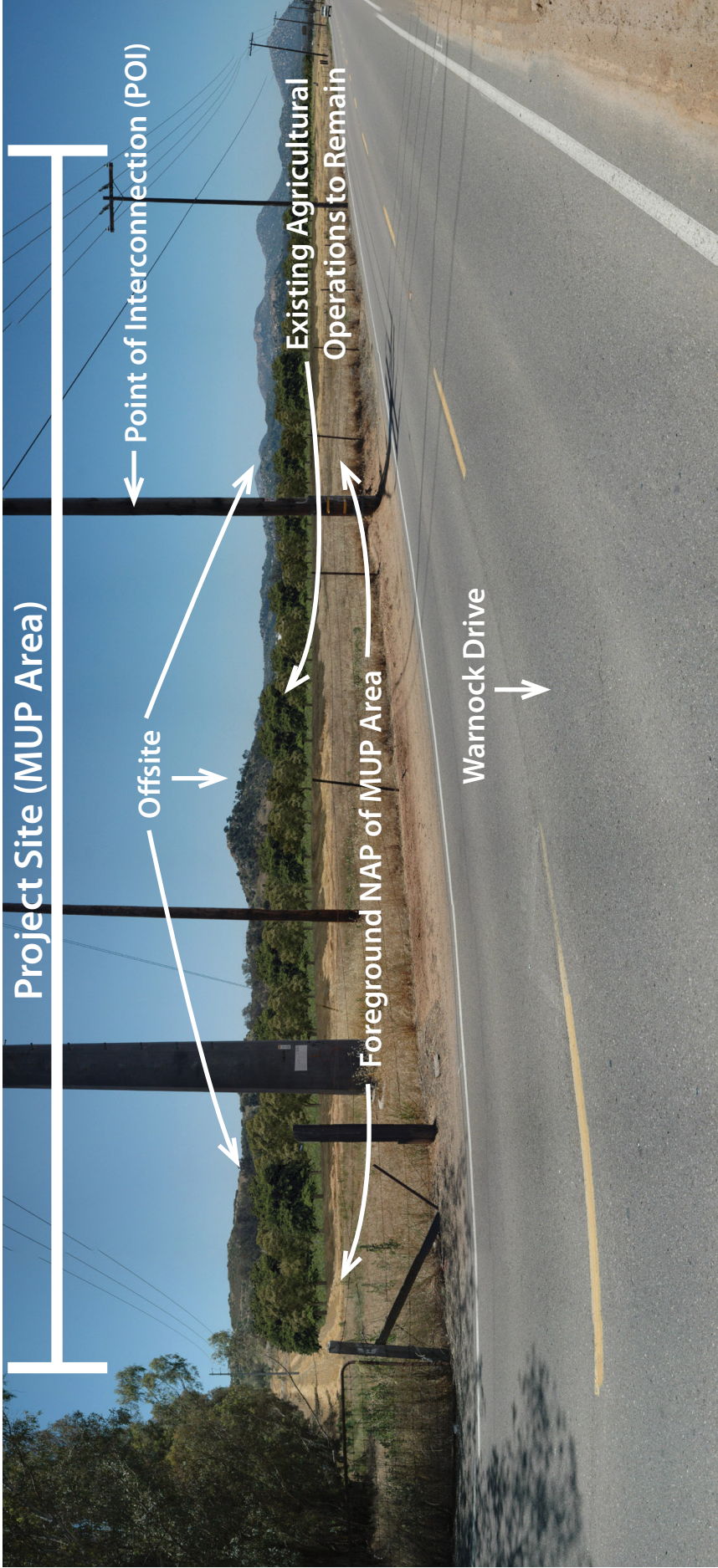
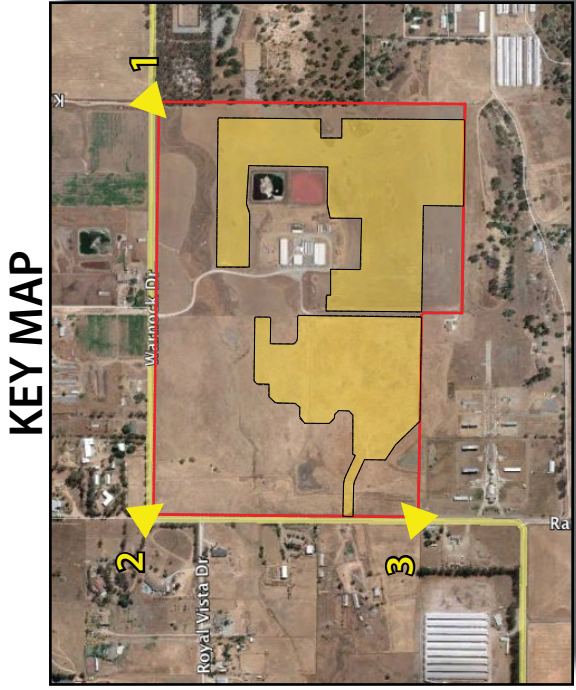


Photo 14: View looking East from Western Boundary of Subject Parcel towards Simon Open Space Preserve.





View 1A: Existing View Looking South-Southwest to Subject Site near Northeast Corner of Property along Warnock Drive.



View 1B: Proposed View Looking South-Southwest to Subject Site near Northeast Corner of Property along Warnock Drive.



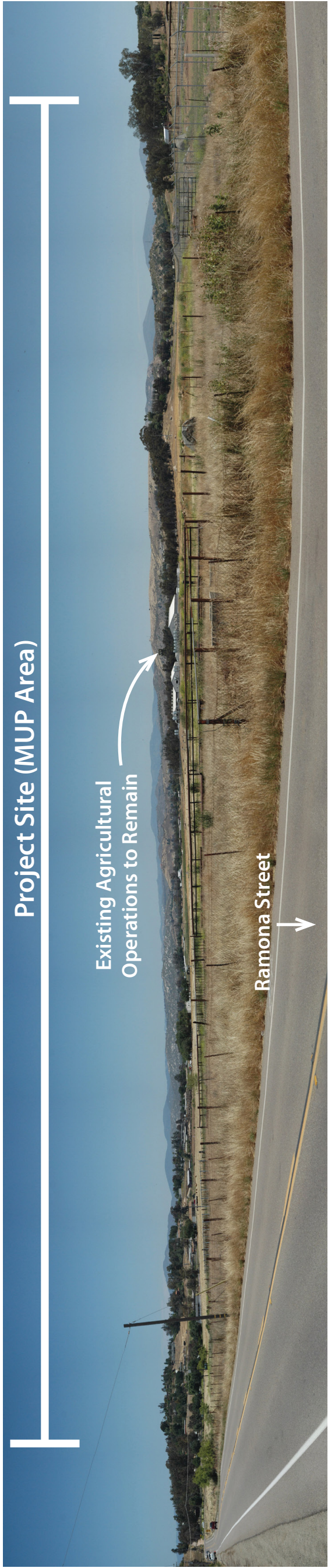


View 2A: Existing View Looking East to South to Subject Site from Intersection of Warnock Drive and Ramona Street.



View 2B: Proposed View Looking East to South to Subject Site from Intersection of Warnock Drive and Ramona Street.



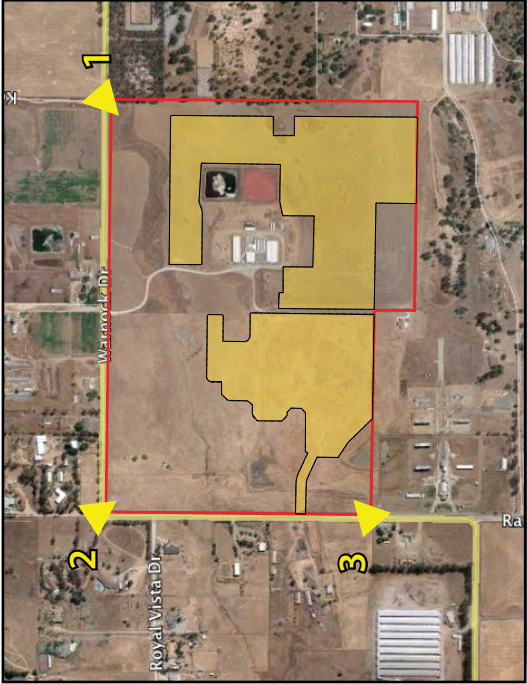


View 3A: Existing View Looking Northwest-East to Subject Site near Southwest Corner of Property Along Ramona Street.



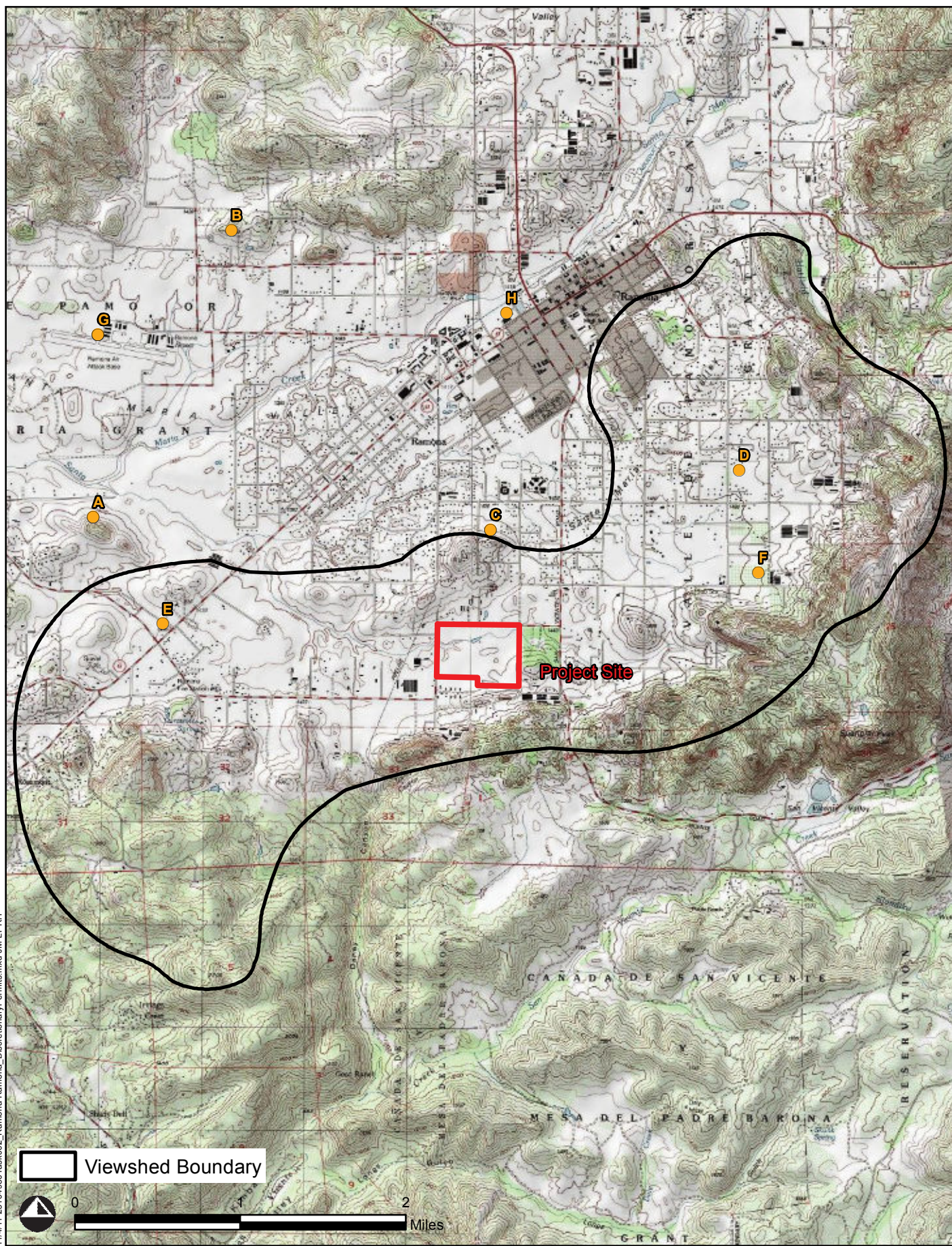
View 3B: Proposed View Looking Northwest-East to Subject Site near Southwest Corner of Property Along Ramona Street.

KEY MAP





11/4/11 25104980Task002\_Ramona Ramona\_DiscretionaryPermits.mxd JM LT RH



Source: SANGis, ESRI Online



# **APPENDIX A:**

## **Project Conformance with Applicable Plans**



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# Sol Orchard – Ramona

## Project Conformance with Applicable Plans

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### County of San Diego General Plan Update

The County of San Diego General Plan Update (adopted August 3, 2011) is intended to provide guidance for the long-term development of San Diego County. The General Plan Update includes various Elements that provide guidance for accommodating future growth while retaining or enhancing the County's rural character, its economy, its environmental resources, and its unique communities. Goals, policies and objectives are provided within each of the Elements to guide future land development and ensure consistency with the County's intended vision for the future of San Diego County. The Guiding Principles of the General Plan Update are to:

- ⌘ Support a reasonable share of projected regional population growth;
- ⌘ Promote health and sustainability by locating new growth near existing and planned infrastructure, services, and jobs in a compact pattern of development;
- ⌘ Reinforce the vitality, local economy, and individual character of existing communities when planning new housing, employment, and recreational opportunities;
- ⌘ Promote environmental stewardship that protects the range of natural resources and habitats that uniquely define the County's character and ecological importance;
- ⌘ Ensure that development accounts for physical constraints and the natural hazards of the land;
- ⌘ Provide and support a multi-modal transportation network that enhances connectivity and supports community development patterns and, when appropriate, plan for development which supports public transportation;
- ⌘ Maintain environmentally sustainable communities and reduce greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to climate change;
- ⌘ Preserve agriculture as an integral component of the region's economy, character, and open space network;
- ⌘ Minimize public costs of infrastructure and services and correlate their timing with new development; and,
- ⌘ Recognize community and stakeholder interests while striving for consensus.

## Chapter 3 - Land Use Element

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### Planning for Sustainability

#### *Policies*

- ∞ **LU-6.9 Development Conformance with Topography.** Require development to conform to the natural topography to limit grading; incorporate and not significantly alter the dominant physical characteristics of a site; and, to utilize natural drainage and topography in conveying storm water to the maximum extent practicable.

Although the majority of land surface in the MUP area is flat, portions would be cleared and grubbed to allow for installation of the panels and associated facilities. Minimal grading (2,400 cubic yards balanced cut and fill) is also required in portions of the site to provide a flat surface for panel installation. Therefore, the topography of the site would largely remain in its natural state.

A significant increase in storm water runoff or treatment needs from the areas affected by the Project is not anticipated to occur. Storm water runoff in areas where facilities would be installed would remain generally unchanged following construction. In addition, the solar panels and supporting structures would occupy a minimal building footprint on the affected properties and would not require or result in a significant change in existing conditions with regard to storm water runoff or treatment needs. As applicable, storm water runoff and treatment would be adequately handled through the implementation of onsite best management practices (BMPs) and/or other design measures and would not result in or require significant changes to existing offsite storm drain facilities.

### Semi-Rural/Rural Lands

#### *Policies*

- ∞ **LU-10.2 Development - Environmental Resource Relationship.** Require development in Semi-Rural and Rural areas to respect and conserve the unique natural features and rural character and avoid sensitive or intact environmental resources and hazard areas.

The Project site has a County Regional Category designation of Semi-Rural Residential. The Project has been designed to avoid or minimize potential impacts to natural resources and largely conserve the natural onsite topography by minimizing grading requirements. Project components have also been designed to minimize potential effects on the existing visual landscape with regard to height and scale, as well as overall visibility, as the Project proposes

vegetative screening along portions of the perimeter fencing to reduce views into the site and reflect and enhance the rural character of the area. No hazardous areas have been identified on the site that would interfere with the proposed development.

## **Infrastructure and Services Supporting Development**

### *Policies*

- ∞ **LU-12.4 Planning for Compatibility.** Plan and site infrastructure for public utilities and public facilities in a manner compatible with community character, minimize visual and environmental impacts, and whenever feasible, locate any facilities and supporting infrastructure outside preserve areas. Require context sensitive Mobility Element road design that is compatible with community character and minimizes visual and environmental impacts; for Mobility Element roads identified in Table M-4, an LOS D or better may not be achieved.

The proposed PV solar facility would be allowed under the existing General Plan and zoning designations with County approval of a MUP and is therefore consistent with the County's intended use for the property. The Project has been designed to minimize environmental impacts through site design measures, and all significant impacts identified can be reduced to less than significant through the implementation of mitigation measures, as appropriate. Additionally, the Project is not located within a preserve area. The Project has also been designed to minimize potential visual effects with regard to height and scale, and vegetative screening is proposed along the northern and western perimeter fencing to reduce public views into the site, particularly from Warnock Drive and Ramona Road, as well as (future) Dye Road, once constructed by the County.

## **Chapter 5 – Conservation and Open Space Element**

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### **Visual Resources**

#### *Goal COS-11*

- ∞ **Preservation of Scenic Resources.** Preservation of scenic resources, including vistas of important natural and unique features, where visual impacts of development are minimized.

## *Policies*

- ∞ **COS-11.1 Protection of Scenic Resources.** Require the protection of scenic highways, corridors, regionally significant scenic vistas, and natural features, including prominent ridgelines, dominant landforms, reservoirs, and scenic landscapes.
- ∞ **COS-11.2 Scenic Resource Connections.** Promote the connection of regionally significant natural features, designated historic landmarks, and points of regional historic, visual, and cultural interest via designated scenic corridors, such as scenic highways and regional trails.

No regionally significant vistas, prominent ridgelines, dominant landforms, or reservoirs are present on the Project site. Additionally, no regionally significant natural features, designated historic landmarks, or points of regional historic or cultural interest occur onsite.

A number of public recreational areas are located within the Ramona area that offer hiking trails. These areas may include San Pasqual County Park, approximately six miles to the northwest; Swartz Canyon County Park, approximately four miles to the east; and, Blue Sky Ecological Reserve, approximately six miles to the west. Additionally, the Cleveland National Forest is located approximately seven miles to the north and 7.5 miles to the east. Several open space preserves are also located within the surrounding area and include Ramona Grasslands Open Space Preserve, approximately 2.2 miles to the northwest; Simon Open Space Preserve, approximately 2.1 miles to the east; and, Barnett Ranch Open Space Preserve, approximately 0.5 miles to the south. Due to the topography of the area and the varied geographic forms of the various surrounding mountains, views from public trails within designated public recreational areas in the site vicinity would be blocked by intervening landforms and vegetation; refer to Section 5.5, Significance Criteria #3, of the Visual Resources Analysis for a more in-depth discussion of views from public trails and recreational areas in the Project vicinity.

No County designated Scenic Highways are located adjacent to the Project site; however, portions of State Route 78, Highland Valley Drive, and San Vicente Road (which is the closest designated Scenic Highway to the Project site, distanced at approximately 0.25 mile to the east) are designated as scenic. Due to distance from the Project site, topography, and intervening development and vegetation, views of the Project site would not occur from these roadways.

To reduce the potential for the Project to adversely affect or alter views from offsite public vantage points, the proposed Project has been designed to distance the Project components from adjacent public roadways (Warnock Drive and Ramona Street). The visibility of the Project components would be further reduced through Project design that minimizes the height and scale of the Project components, and allows a portion of the 110-acre property to remain in its present state. Additionally, the Project proposes landscape screening to further

reduce views of the Project components within the visual landscape and to maintain and enhance the rural character of the site and its surroundings. Therefore, the Project is not anticipated to adversely affect vistas of important natural or unique features, scenic highways, corridors, regionally significant scenic vistas, or other natural features.

∞ **COS-11.3 Development Siting and Design.** Require development within visually sensitive areas to minimize visual impacts and to preserve unique or special visual features, particularly in rural areas, through the following:

- Creative site planning;
- Integration of natural features into the project;
- Appropriate scale, materials, and design to complement the surrounding natural landscape;
- Minimal disturbance of topography;
- Clustering of development so as to preserve a balance of open space vistas, natural features, and community character; and,
- Creation of contiguous open space networks.

The proposed Project design would minimize required grading (approximately 2,400 cubic yards), thereby reducing potential impacts to the natural onsite topography and largely maintaining the natural character of the physical underlying ground surface.

As stated previously, the Project components as proposed are of relatively limited height and scale in order to minimize the visibility of such elements within the visual landscape. Installation of the proposed landscape screening along portions of the MUP area perimeter would further blend the Project components into the landscape and reflect the rural character of the surrounding natural landscape. The Project is not adjacent to any open space areas. As designed, development would affect a portion of the 110-acre parcel, allowing the remainder to remain in its current natural state.

∞ **COS-11.5 Collaboration with Private and Public Agencies.** Coordinate with the California Public Utilities Commission, power companies, and other public agencies to avoid siting energy generation, transmission facilities, and other public improvements in locations that impact visually sensitive areas, whenever feasible. Require the design of public improvements within visually sensitive areas to blend into the landscape.

The Project site is not located adjacent to any County designated Scenic Highways according to the Conservation and Open Space Element of the General Plan Update, and no visually sensitive areas are within close proximity. The Project has been designed to minimize the potential visual effects of the Project components on existing views with regard to height and

scale; distance the MUP development area from nearby public roadways (Warnock Drive and Ramona Street); and, provide landscape screening along the fencing of the western and northern portions of the MUP development area that face these public roadways in order to restrict views into the site and to blend the development into the surrounding landscape.

- ∞ **COS-11.7 Underground Utilities.** Require new development to place utilities underground and encourage “undergrounding” in existing development to maintain viewsheds, reduce hazards associated with hanging lines and utility poles, and to keep pace with current and future technologies.

Within the Project boundaries, panel arrays would be electrically connected into panel strings using wiring attached to the racking. Panel strings would be electrically connected to each other via underground wiring. Gathering lines would connect individual panel array strings to one or more inverters/transformers and combiner boxes. Wiring from the panel strings would be connected to combiner boxes. Electrical current would then be transferred to the inverters which would convert the Direct Current (DC) produced by the PV solar panels into Alternating Current (AC).

Energy generated by the Project would be delivered to an existing 12 kV distribution line that runs parallel to Warnock Drive. Connection would be made from the Project site via overhead line to an existing pole located on Warnock Drive. No export to transmission is anticipated.

## GOAL COS-13

- ∞ **Dark Skies.** Preserved dark skies that contribute to rural character and are necessary for the local observatories.

## *Policies*

- ∞ **COS-13.1 Restrict Light and Glare.** Restrict outdoor light and glare from development projects in Semi-Rural and Rural Lands and designated rural communities to retain the quality of night skies by minimizing light pollution.
- ∞ **COS-13.2 Palomar and Mount Laguna.** Minimize, to the maximum extent feasible, the impact of development on the dark skies surrounding Palomar and Mount Laguna observatories to maintain dark skies which are vital to these two world-class observatories by restricting exterior light sources within the impact areas of the observatories.
- ∞ **COS-13.3 Collaboration to Retain Night Skies.** Coordinate with adjacent Federal and State agencies, local jurisdictions, and tribal governments to retain the quality of night skies by minimizing light pollution.

The PV solar panels would be of either mono- or polycrystalline material and would be black in color and highly absorptive. The materials used to construct the panels are designed to minimize the potential for reflection and retain as much of the solar spectrum as possible, thereby reducing glare. Additionally, based on technical evidence evaluating the reflectivity of the PV solar panels, the proposed Project would not install highly reflective building materials that would result in a substantial increase in light or glare that would affect the surrounding area, or that would produce reflective light that would create adverse disability or discomfort glare.

Limited Project lighting would be installed to allow for security. Low-level lighting would be installed at the main entry gate to facilitate access. All lighting would be operated manually or activated via motion sensors, and would be shielded and directed downward to minimize the potential for glare or spillover onto adjacent ownerships. All lighting would conform to County of San Diego outdoor lighting requirements.

## **Air Quality, Climate Change, and Energy**

### *Policies*

- 8) **COS-14.4 Sustainable Technology and Projects.** Require technologies and projects that contribute to the conservation of resources in a sustainable manner, that are compatible with community character, and that increase the self-sufficiency of individual communities, residents, and businesses.

The Project is intended to allow for the installation and operation of a photovoltaic electrical generation facility and represents an opportunity to provide residents of Ramona and the greater surrounding area with clean solar energy. The Project is expected to supply to the Ramona area roughly 10 percent of power at peak load conditions and 20 to 25 percent during lighter load conditions. As future population growth continues within San Diego County, the demand for electrical service will continue to increase accordingly. The Project represents an additional clean source of electrical power that would supplement energy currently supplied by the existing power grid, thereby reducing the potential for power shortages to occur and decreasing demands on the capabilities of the existing distribution system.

The Project has been designed to respect the existing rural character of the Ramona community with regard to scale, bulk, height, materials and color, and light and glare effects. Furthermore, design measures are proposed to require installation of landscape screening along portions of the MUP perimeter fencing to minimize potential effects on the existing visual setting and adjacent lands, and blend the development into the surrounding landscape.



## Ramona Community Plan

### COMMUNITY BACKGROUND

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#### C. Environmental Setting

##### ENERGY

- ∞ Most of the electrical energy used in the CPA is supplied by San Diego Gas and Electric Company. The sources of this energy are far from Ramona; however, as is the case with air quality, conservation measures must be applied on a region-wide basis, and each individual and public agency will increasingly be required to modify their existing practices. Additionally, however, the use of local energy resources from the sun and wind are encouraged in the Ramona Community Plan, as an alternative to depend on, and further incremental depletion of, regional supplies.

The Project proposes development and operation of a PV solar farm to be located on privately-held lands near Ramona for the long-term generation of clean solar energy. The proposed facilities would have an overall production capacity of 7.5 MW. The Project is expected to supply to the Ramona area roughly 10 percent of power at peak load conditions and 20 to 25 percent during lighter load conditions.

### 1. LAND USE (LU)

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#### 1.1 Community Character

##### GOAL

- ∞ GOAL LU1.1 The rural atmosphere of the Ramona community is preserved and enhanced, while encouraging a balance of land uses that are compatible with a country lifestyle.

The Project site has a County Regional Category designation of Semi-Rural Residential, and the proposed use is allowed under the existing General Plan and zoning designations with County approval of a MUP. The proposed use is therefore consistent with the land use intended by the County for the property. Additionally, the Project has been designed to be compatible with the rural character of the Ramona community with regard to scale, height, materials, and visual character. Vegetative screening is also proposed along the perimeter fencing of the northern and western portions of the MUP development area to reduce views from public roadways or adjacent private land ownerships. As stated above, minimal grading of the site is required, allowing onsite topography to largely remain in its present state.

## **1.2 Community Conservation and Protection**

### **GOAL**

- ☞ Refer to General Plan Goals and Policies.

The proposed Project would be consistent with applicable goals and policies of the County General Plan Update. Refer to the discussion above under County of San Diego General Plan Update.

## **2. Circulation and Mobility**

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### **2.1 Integrated Mobility and Access**

#### **GOAL**

- ☞ Goal CM 1.1 A circulation system that accommodates pedestrian, equestrian, cycling, as well as vehicular users.

The Project design does not include any improvements to adjacent Warnock Drive or Ramona Street, other than minor improvements to allow for the entrance drive along Ramona Street; however, the Project applicant would clear a 10-foot wide (maximum) path along Warnock Drive and Ramona Street within the right-of-way. The Project accommodates the future alignment of Dye Road proposed within the western portion of the subject parcel, consistent with the County of San Diego General Plan Circulation Element. The alignment is proposed to extend from Ramona Street to Warnock Drive, with one additional proposed roadway connection to each of these streets along the length of the alignment (four total).

### **2.2 Local Road Network**

#### **GOAL**

- ☞ Goal CM 2.1 A circulation network which will efficiently serve present and future land uses, will facilitate movement between Ramona and other communities, but will not negatively impact the character of the community.

#### *Policies and Recommendations*

- ☞ Policy CM 2.1.3 Ensure that road design follows the natural contours thereby minimizing any impact upon the aesthetic and environmental character of the planning area.

Refer to response to GOAL CM 1.1, above. The Project does not propose any improvements to Ramona Street or Warnock Drive. The Project provides for the future extension of Dye Road through a portion of the site, consistent with the County Circulation Element. The

Project applicant would not be responsible for construction of Dye Road. The road would be constructed to County roadway design standards that would be consistent with the character of the Ramona community.

## **2.10 Infrastructure and Utilities**

### *d. Energy (Natural Gas and Electricity)*

#### **GOAL**

☞ Refer to General Plan Goals and Policies.

The proposed Project would be consistent with applicable goals and policies of the County General Plan Update. Refer to the discussion above under County of San Diego General Plan Update.

## **3. Conservation and Open Space (COS)**

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### **3.1 Resource Conservation and Management**

#### **GOAL**

☞ Goal COS 1.1 The conservation, preservation, and wise utilization of resources in the Ramona planning area.

All potential impacts resulting with would be avoided and/or reduced to less than significant through Project design or the implementation of mitigation measures, where appropriate. Additionally, grading requirements for installation of the Project components would be minimal allowing the Project site to remain largely in its natural state. If desired in the future, the Project components could be removed from the site and the land returned to its original use, thereby conserving the existing landscape.

### *c. Scenic Resources and Highways*

☞ Designation of selected major scenic routes through the Ramona Community Planning Area will preserve the scenic integrity of the visual corridors of these routes. These routes are designated in the Conservation and Open Space Element of the General Plan Update, Table COS-1 and Figure C-5. The Community Plan recommends implementation of the Scenic Preservation Overlay Zone along the corridors of these routes to provide protection from unsightly land uses until such time as the appropriate agency (State or County) can initiate complete corridor studies and development guidelines. The routes

chosen through the Ramona Area also provide links to other scenic highway segments adopted for neighboring communities and cities.

Several designated scenic highways are located within the Ramona area. The segment of State Route 78 designated as scenic (approximately 1.9 miles north) lies outside of the defined Project viewshed and would therefore not offer views of the Project site. A portion of Highland Valley Road near its intersection with SR 67 is designated as scenic and lies within the Project viewshed; however, due to intervening topography, elevation differences, and distance from the site, the Project components would not be visible from this location. Additionally, San Vicente Road runs approximately 0.25 mile east of the Project site; however, due to the relatively flat viewing plane and intervening vegetation (large, dense eucalyptus grove of approximately 40 feet in height, adjacent to the Project site to the east), views of the site from this roadway would not occur.

## **San Diego County Zoning Ordinance**

Portions of the County Zoning Ordinance that may affect the assessment of visual impacts are generally zoning overlay designators. Relevant designators include:

- ⌘ B – Community Design Review Area
- ⌘ D – Design Review Area
- ⌘ G – Sensitive Resource
- ⌘ H – Historic/Archaeological Landmark or District
- ⌘ J – Special Historic District
- ⌘ S – Scenic Area

None of the above designators apply to the Project site, with exception of the G designator relative to structure height.

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